



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

WEDNESDAY — 24 Nov 2021



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	11/24 US warns citizens in Ethiopia: leave
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-warn-citizens-ethiopia-leave-prime-minister-heads/story?id=81354078

The U.S. government is warning American citizens in Ethiopia even more starkly to leave the country now, as the conflict there continues to deteriorate.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is heading to the front lines to lead the federal government's forces, he announced, urging his fellow citizens to join him and "lead the country with a sacrifice."

On the other side, forces from Ethiopia's Tigray region, now aligned with other ethnic-based groups, are marching toward the capital Addis Ababa, pledging to end Abiy's blockade of their region one year after fighting there burst open decades-old wounds.

Now the conflict in Africa's second-most populous nation is increasingly existential for both sides, potentially "ripping the country apart and spilling over into other countries in the region," as Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned in recent days.

The U.S. special envoy for the region said he still had hope for a ceasefire and a negotiated resolution after some "nascent progress," but he warned the fast-moving conflict threatened to swiftly sweep away international diplomatic efforts and cause "a bloodbath situation or chaos."

That fear has driven fresh warnings from foreign countries, including France and Turkey, urging their citizens to depart the country immediately while commercial flights remain. The United Nations announced it was evacuating its staff's dependents on Tuesday, too.

Since Nov. 5, the U.S. embassy in Addis has been on ordered departure, evacuating non-emergency staff and diplomats' families and leaving a smaller team behind. While the mission remains open and continues to provide services like passports and repatriation loans, the U.S. military is maintaining a "state of readiness," according to U.S. Africa Command, in case there are issues "related to the safety of our diplomats where the security environment has deteriorated."

But after the unprecedented, chaotic evacuation effort from Afghanistan, the State Department has gone to extraordinary lengths to make sure U.S. citizens in Ethiopia know military flights like those out of Kabul will not be coming to rescue them.

"There should be absolutely no expectation of the military becoming involved," a senior State Department official said Monday. For months now, the agency has issued travel warnings, urging Americans to leave now while Addis's international airport continues commercial flights.

This week, their warnings have employed even stronger language: "We just want to make sure that we don't get into a situation where U.S. citizens are waiting for something that's never going to happen," the senior State Department official added. "We need them to remember what the norm is, and the norm is leaving via commercial while that's available."

The official and others have declined to speak to any plans to close the embassy or evacuate American diplomats, except to say that they're "engaged in contingency planning for hypotheticals" with the Pentagon.

The Pentagon declined to comment on any troop movements to ABC News after a report that the U.S. had put Navy ships in the region on "standby" and deployed a small number of Army Rangers to the neighboring country Djibouti. The Pentagon's East African Response Force -- a team trained to move within 24 hours to assist U.S. embassies in the region with additional security or an evacuation -- is based in the small African country

Despite the increasingly grim developments on the battlefield, the State Department made clear it has not yet given up on a diplomatic resolution.

"There is some nascent progress in trying to get the parties to move from a military confrontation to a negotiating process, but what concerns us is this fragile progress risks being outpaced by the alarming

developments on the ground... by the military escalation on the two sides," Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman, special envoy for the Horn of Africa, told reporters Tuesday.

In particular, Tigrayan forces said this week they are now some 130 miles northeast of Addis, while Abiy declared Monday that he would go to the front lines to lead troops directly.

"Unfortunately, each side is trying to achieve its goals by military force and believe they are on the cusp of winning," Feltman said Tuesday, back in Washington after days of meetings in Addis. He met not just Abiy and Tigrayan leaders, but also the African Union's special envoy for the conflict, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo.

From those meetings, Feltman said he sensed a "greater willingness to brainstorm with us about how you could put together the pieces of a deescalation and negotiated ceasefire process" -- instead of an outright refusal to even consider any other means but force.

What the two sides say they want can be achieved at the same time, too, Feltman added: Abiy wants to return Tigrayan forces to Tigray region, and Tigrayan forces want Abiy's de facto blockade of the region to end.

"The tragedy is, the sadness is that both sides have in mind the same type of elements. ... They just need to muster the political will in order to pivot from the military to the negotiations, and we're not the only ones encouraging them to do so, but we can't force them to the table," Feltman said.

As of now, U.S. and international pressure, Obasanjo's mediation and the humanitarian suffering of the Ethiopian people have not yet been enough for leaders to come to the table. Feltman said Abiy also told him in their meeting Sunday that he had "confidence" he could achieve his goals militarily -- and the seasoned U.S. diplomat warned the incitement of ethnic-based violence is spiraling out of control.

That means there's "no sign" that direct negotiations are "on the horizon," but perhaps some back-channel diplomacy is possible -- and Feltman and Obasanjo will continue to pursue that, according to the U.S. diplomat.

"Right now, both sides are still pursuing military options, but they are also engaged on other ways to pursue their objectives... And that's what I find marginally encouraging, but again, I don't want to overstate the case," Feltman said.

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HEADLINE	11/24 Jobless claims plunge; lowest in 52yrs
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/us-jobless-claims-plunge-199000-lowest-52-years-81370114
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits plummeted last week to the lowest level in more than half a century, another sign that the U.S. job market is rebounding rapidly from last year's coronavirus recession.</p> <p>Jobless claims dropped by 71,000 to 199,000, the lowest since mid-November 1969. The drop was much bigger than economists expected.</p> <p>The four-week average of claims, which smooths out weekly ups and downs, also dropped — by 21,000 to just over 252,000, the lowest since mid-March 2020 when the pandemic slammed the economy.</p> <p>Since topping 900,000 in early January, the applications have fallen steadily toward and now fallen below their prepandemic level of around 220,000 a week. Claims for jobless aid are a proxy for layoffs.</p> <p>Overall, 2 million Americans were collecting traditional unemployment checks the week that ended Nov. 13, down slightly from the week before.</p>

Until Sept. 6, the federal government had supplemented state unemployment insurance programs by paying an extra payment of \$300 a week and extending benefits to gig workers and to those who were out of work for six months or more. Including the federal programs, the number of Americans receiving some form of jobless aid peaked at more than 33 million in June 2020.

The job market has staged a remarkable comeback since the spring of 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic forced businesses to close or cut hours and kept many Americans at home as a health precaution. In March and April last year, employers slashed more than 22 million jobs.

But government relief checks, super-low interest rates and the rollout of vaccines combined to give consumers the confidence and financial wherewithal to start spending again. Employers, scrambling to meet an unexpected surge in demand, have made 18 million new hires since April 2020 and are expected to add another 575,000 this month. Still, the United States remains 4 million short of the jobs it had in February 2020.

Companies now complain that they can't find workers to fill job openings, a near-record 10.4 million in September. Workers, finding themselves with bargaining clout for the first time in decades, are becoming choosier about jobs; a record 4.4 million quit in September, a sign they have confidence in their ability to find something better.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Spokane mayor orders audit FD expenses
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/money/economy/spokane-audit-fire-departments-overtime-expenses/293-52f5e56b-6f2a-4d24-aabe-883ad5e94aba
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Spokane Mayor Nadine Woodward has ordered a comprehensive review of leave usage in the Spokane Fire Department (SFD) leading up to the vaccine mandate.</p> <p>According to a press release from the City of Spokane, the process will include a forensic audit, after a three-month spike in sick time taken leading up to the mandate. In August, Gov. Jay Inslee announced most state employees and health care workers will be required to be fully vaccinated by Oct. 18.</p> <p>The City Council is expected to consider on Monday an additional \$5 million budget authorization to cover SFD operating costs through the end of the year. The amount would cover the projected overage, which is based on the year-to-date run rate and historical data for the final three reporting periods.</p> <p>“We are still evaluating the circumstance, but what we have learned so far led us to take immediate action to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of the circumstances that created this situation, contain expenditures, and prevent future overages,” Woodward said.</p> <p>Woodward has directed the finance team to initiate the forensic audit of leave practices and uses and the resulting impacts to staffing and overtime.</p> <p>The audit is expected to take several weeks to complete once it started.</p> <p>So far, they know sick time usage showed a spike in August, September and October and doubled the number of days taken in any given month even during the early months of the pandemic and continued an upward trend that began in April.</p> <p>The monthly uniform overtime rate increased from \$232,000 per pay period during the two years prior to the pandemic to \$576,000 per pay period during the pandemic through October.</p> <p>In the future, they will schedule a fire academy in February to hire 20 firefighters, continue to monitor pandemic-related overtime costs, study non-pandemic impacts to sick leave usage and improve tools to monitor budget and spending organization-wide.</p>

HEADLINE	11/23 Bellevue 'Snowflake Lane' safety protocols
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/bellevue-police-announce-safety-protocols-for-snowflake-lane-in-wake-of-wisconsin-christmas-parade-tragedy
GIST	<p>BELLEVUE, Wash. - In wake of the tragedy during the Waukesha, Wisconsin Christmas parade, the Bellevue Police Department put several safety protocols in place for Snowflake Lane.</p> <p>Each night, police will block the parade streets with large barrier trucks and cement ecology trucks are strategically placed at the corners of streets to prevent access to sidewalks. There will also be anti-vehicle barriers blocking access from the parking lots and side streets.</p> <p>"Multiple uniformed officers are present each night providing traffic control and event security," said Captain Dave Sanabria. "We are proud of our safety record at Snowflake Lane over the past 16 years. We credit our planning and partnership with the Bellevue Collection and other responding agencies for the safe events."</p> <p>Snowflake Lane kicks off its 17th season on Friday, Nov. 26 and runs through Dec. 24. The holiday parade begins at 7 p.m. on Bellevue Way NE between NE 4th Street and NE 8th Street.</p> <p>Police recommend getting there early and spreading out where possible.</p> <p>The crowds are typically most dense between NE 8th St and NE 6th St, police say. They urge attendees to consider viewing the parade closer to NE 4th St along Bellevue Way NE.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/24 Hospitals overwhelmed into Thanksgiving
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/11/24/covid-cases-staffing-hospitals-thanksgiving-vaccinations/8743533002/
GIST	<p>As families prepare to gather over the Thanksgiving holiday, some hospitals across the country are being overwhelmed by COVID-19 cases and staffing shortages, and surges tied to holiday gatherings could make it worse.</p> <p>A potentially weeklong closure of a New York emergency department Monday was sparked by a staffing shortage after unvaccinated health care workers were not allowed to continue work due to a state rule. Mount Sinai South Nassau's emergency room in Long Beach will direct patients to its Oceanside emergency department.</p> <p>Officials in Denver said hospitals are filling up, with about 80% of those hospitalized for COVID-19 being unvaccinated, 9News reported. Dr. Robin Wittenstein, CEO of Denver Health, told the outlet their system is on the "brink of collapse."</p> <p>"We are here today because too many people chose not to get vaccinated even though they were eligible," said Denver Department of Public Health and Environment Executive Director Bob McDonald.</p> <p>The University of Iowa's hospital is also worried about hardship as COVID and flu cases are on the rise. In Dubuque County, hospitalizations for COVID-19 as high as they were a year ago before vaccines were available.</p> <p>"It's cold now, and people are going to be indoors, and everyone's tired of this," Chief Medical Officer Theresa Brennan said. "People are hungry for human contact. And because of that, it's likely people are going to be less strict about gathering, about masking, about distancing than they were last year."</p>

	<p>Hospitals in the cold Upper Midwest, especially Michigan and Minnesota, are also filled with COVID-19 patients who are mostly unvaccinated.</p> <p>For the holidays, “We would encourage people who gather to do so safely after they’ve been fully vaccinated, as we’ve been saying for months now,” said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/24 IAEA: negotiations in Iran inconclusive
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iaea-chief-says-negotiations-iran-proved-inconclusive-2021-11-24/
GIST	<p>VIENNA, Nov 24 (Reuters) - U.N. atomic watchdog chief Rafael Grossi told his agency's Board of Governors on Wednesday that negotiations he had held in Tehran this week over Iran's nuclear programme had proved inconclusive.</p> <p>Grossi returned from Tehran on Tuesday after meeting the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization and Iran's foreign minister as he sought to strike a deal with Iran to reinstall four of his agency's cameras at a centrifuge-parts workshop that was the victim of apparent sabotage.</p> <p>But he appeared to return without progress leaving a thorn in the side of relations between Iran and the West days before indirect talks between Tehran and Washington over reviving the battered 2015 Iran nuclear deal resume on Monday.</p> <p>"Despite my best efforts, these extensive negotiations and deliberations to address Iran's outstanding safeguards issues, detailed in the two reports, proved inconclusive," Grossi told the 35-nation Board of Governors at the start of its quarterly meeting, according to the text of the speech sent to reporters.</p> <p>He was referring to reports recently issued by the agency.</p> <p>The standoff over the Karaj workshop that makes parts for advanced centrifuges, machines that enrich uranium, is one of several issues that have soured relations between Iran and the IAEA and angered Western powers that say Tehran must back down.</p> <p>The IAEA also wants answers from Iran on the origin of uranium particles found at several apparently old but undeclared sites, and has told its member states that Iran keeps subjecting its inspectors to "excessively invasive searches, which resulted in them feeling intimidated" during security checks.</p> <p>The United States and its European allies would normally pressure Iran on those issues by trying to pass a resolution against it at the quarterly meetings.</p> <p>With the wider talks on the 2015 deal due to resume on Monday after a five-month break, however, diplomats say it is unlikely there will be any such attempt for fear of jeopardising those talks.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/24 Europe rethinks booster shot policy
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/europe-rethinks-booster-shot-policy-covid-cases-hit-records-2021-11-24/
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS/PRAGUE, Nov 24 (Reuters) - Coronavirus infections broke records on Wednesday in parts of Europe, once again the epicentre of a pandemic which has prompted new curbs on movement and made health experts think again about booster vaccination shots.</p> <p>Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary all reported new highs in daily infections as winter grips the continent and people gather indoors in the run-up to Christmas, providing a perfect breeding ground for COVID-19.</p>

The disease has swept the world in the two years since it was first identified in central China, infecting more than 258 million people and killing 5.4 million.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the EU public health agency, recommended vaccine boosters for all adults, with priority for those over 40, in a major shift of policy.

"Available evidence emerging from Israel and the UK shows a significant increase in protection against infection and severe disease following a booster dose in all age groups in the short term," the ECDC said in a report published on Wednesday.

Many EU countries have already begun giving booster doses to their populations but are using different criteria to make priorities and different intervals between the first shots and boosters.

ECDC head Andrea Ammon said boosters would increase protection against infection caused by waning immunity and "could potentially reduce the transmission in the population and prevent additional hospitalisations and deaths".

She advised countries with low levels of vaccination to speed up their rollouts and warned of high risks of a further spike in deaths and hospitalisations in Europe in December and January if the recommended measures are not introduced.

Sweden will begin gradually rolling out boosters to all adults, government and health officials said. Booster shots of mRNA vaccine have been offered to people aged 65 or above, with an eye to eventually extending the shots to other groups.

"We are faced with an uncertain winter," Health Minister Lena Hallengren told a news conference. "You can contribute by staying home if you're sick or by getting vaccinated if you haven't already, and taking your booster when you're offered it."

Unlike many of its neighbours, Sweden has not been hit by a new wave of infections, and hospitalisations remain relatively low, but there have been scattered signs the pandemic is picking up pace.

Slovakia reported its highest daily rise in cases on Wednesday, just ahead of a government meeting likely to agree a short-term lockdown to quell the world's fastest surge in infections.

VACCINATION RESERVATIONS

Neighbouring Austria has already locked down its population this week for at least 10 days, becoming the first to reimpose such restrictions. It will also require the whole population to be vaccinated from Feb. 1, infuriating many in a country where scepticism about state mandates affecting individual freedoms runs high.

The Czech Republic reported its highest daily rise in infections, with cases surpassing 25,000 for the first time and putting further strain on hospitals.

The country of 10.7 million has the world's fourth-highest infection rate per capita, according to Our World in Data.

The Czech government, due to hand over power in the coming weeks after losing an October election, has put in place measures barring unvaccinated people from restaurants, cinemas and other services such as hairdressers, aiming to boost vaccination figures that lag many in the European Union.

The outgoing government is also looking to institute mandatory vaccines for people over 60 and some professions, like healthcare workers.

	<p>Hungary reported a record 12,637 new daily COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 1.045 million with 33,519 deaths.</p> <p>Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government, which opposes further lockdowns for fear of stifling the economy, launched a vaccination campaign this week, offering shots without prior registration.</p> <p>However, the idea of mandatory vaccinations has raised concerns among Hungarians, with some expressing reservations despite already being vaccinated.</p> <p>"Making the vaccine obligatory is a difficult thing as it could limit people severely, including from earning a living, so I think such a decision should be made very carefully," said Zsuzsanna Koszoru as she lined up for a booster jab.</p> <p>Many German regions have already started to impose tighter rules amid the country's worst COVID surge yet as the curtain comes down on the Angela Merkel era, including demanding that vaccinated people show a negative test to attend indoor events.</p> <p>Outgoing Health Minister Jens Spahn said on Monday that by the end of the winter almost everyone in Germany would be "vaccinated, recovered or dead".</p>
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HEADLINE	11/24 Russia, Ukraine both step up military alert
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-ukraine-both-step-up-military-alert-with-combat-drills-2021-11-24/
GIST	<p>MOSCOW/KYIV, Nov 24 (Reuters) - Russia staged military drills in the Black Sea, south of Ukraine, on Wednesday and said it needed to sharpen the combat-readiness of its conventional and nuclear forces because of heightened NATO activity near its borders.</p> <p>Ukraine, which with its ally the United States has said it believes Russia may be preparing an invasion, staged exercises of its own near the border with Belarus.</p> <p>The increase of military activity on both sides follows weeks of rising tension that have raised the risk of war between the two neighbours, even though Russia denies aggressive intent and Western intelligence sources have told Reuters they do not see any invasion as imminent.</p> <p>The United States and NATO have signalled their backing for Ukraine in ways that Moscow considers provocative, including through warship manoeuvres this month in the Black Sea and a delivery of U.S. patrol boats to the Ukrainian navy.</p> <p>British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss told Reuters on Wednesday it would be "a grave mistake from Russia" to attack Ukraine.</p> <p>Russian fighter planes and ships practiced repelling air attacks on naval bases and responding with air strikes during military drills on Wednesday in the Black Sea, Interfax reported.</p> <p>Separately, the news agency quoted Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu as saying the need for Russia to further develop its armed forces was dictated by "the complicated military and political conditions in the world and the growing activity of NATO countries near Russia's borders".</p> <p>He said raising the armed forces' capabilities, supporting the combat readiness of nuclear forces and strengthening the potential of non-nuclear deterrence were among the priorities.</p> <p>Shoigu on Tuesday complained that U.S. bombers had rehearsed a nuclear strike on Russia from two different directions earlier this month and complained that the planes had come too close the Russian border, drills the Pentagon said had adhered to international protocols.</p>

UKRAINIAN 'SPECIAL OPERATION'

Ukraine on Wednesday held what it called a "special operation" at the border with Belarus, including drone exercises and military drills for anti-tank and airborne units.

It has deployed 8,500 extra troops to its border with Belarus, saying it fears being drawn into the migrant crisis, which has seen the European Union accuse Minsk of flying in people from the Middle East and pushing them to enter neighbouring Poland. Belarus denies fomenting the crisis.

Kyiv also worries that the border with Belarus, a close Russian ally, could be used by Russia to stage a military assault.

The head of Ukraine's military intelligence told the Military Times outlet this weekend that Russia had more than 92,000 troops massed around Ukraine's borders and was preparing for an attack by the end of January or beginning of February.

Moscow has dismissed such suggestions as inflammatory, said it was not threatening anyone and defended its right to deploy its troops as it wished.

Intelligence sources, diplomats and analysts say Moscow may be using the escalation of tension with Ukraine as part of a wider strategy to exert pressure in Europe, including by backing Belarus in the migrant crisis and using its influence as the continent's top gas supplier to press for quick regulatory approval of its new Nord Stream 2 pipeline to Germany.

"It feels... more like another piece of coercive leverage that the Russians are heaping onto this strategic situation in Eastern Europe," said Samir Puri, senior fellow in hybrid warfare at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"It may well have value in that alone, rather than having to be followed through with a full-scale invasion which would be politically disastrous for Putin."

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HEADLINE	11/24 New republic forms: Barbados
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/new-republic-is-born-barbados-celebrates-ditching-britains-queen-2021-11-24/
GIST	<p>LONDON, Nov 24 (Reuters) - Barbados, a former British colony, will next week ditch Queen Elizabeth as head of state, breaking its last remaining imperial bonds with Britain nearly 400 years since the first English ship arrived at the Caribbean island.</p> <p>Barbados casts the removal of Elizabeth II, who is queen of Barbados and 15 other realms including the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and Jamaica, as a sign of confidence and a way to finally break with the demons of its colonial history.</p> <p>"This is the end of the story of colonial exploitation of the mind and body," said Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, a Barbadian historian. He said this was a historic moment for Barbados, the Caribbean and all post-colonial societies.</p> <p>"The people of this island have struggled, not only for freedom and justice, but to remove themselves from the tyranny of imperial and colonial authority," said Beckles, vice-chancellor of The University of the West Indies.</p> <p>The birth of the republic, 55 years to the day since Barbados declared independence, finally unclasps almost all the colonial bonds that have kept the tiny island in the Lesser Antilles tied to England since an English ship claimed it for King James I in 1625.</p>

It may also be a harbinger of a broader attempt by other former colonies to cut ties to the British monarchy as it braces for the end of Elizabeth's nearly 70-year-old reign and the future accession of Charles, who will attend the republican celebrations in Bridgetown.

Barbados's move is the first time a realm has removed the queen as head of state in nearly 30 years: Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean, proclaimed itself a republic but remained in the Commonwealth, an association of mostly former British colonies which is home to 2.5 billion people.

Buckingham Palace says the issue is a matter for the people of Barbados.

SUGAR AND SLAVES

Originally populated by waves of Saladoid-Barrancoid and Kalinago migrants, Spanish slaver raids forced Amerindians to flee. Barbados was unpopulated when the English first arrived.

The English initially used white British indentured servants to toil on the plantations of tobacco, cotton, indigo and sugar, but Barbados in just a few decades would become England's first truly profitable slave society.

Barbados received 600,000 enslaved Africans between 1627 and 1833, who were put to work in the sugar plantations, earning fortunes for the English owners.

"Barbados under English colonial rules became the laboratory for plantation societies in the Caribbean," said Richard Drayton, a professor of imperial and global history at Kings College, London who lived in Barbados as a child.

"It becomes the laboratory for slave society, which is then exported to Jamaica and the Carolinas and Georgia after that."

More than 10 million Africans were shackled into the Atlantic slave trade by European nations between the 15th and 19th centuries. Those who survived the often brutal voyage, ended up toiling on plantations.

While full freedom was finally granted in 1838, the plantation owners preserved considerable economic and political power into the 20th Century. The island gained full independence in 1966.

REPUBLICAN SEEDS

Prince Charles, the 73-year-old heir to the British throne, will travel to Barbados for the ceremonies marking the removal of his 95-year-old mother as head of state.

Barbados will remain a republic within the Commonwealth, a grouping of 54 countries across Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific that has always been a priority for Elizabeth, who heads it.

Though its name will remain simply Barbados, its removal of the queen may well sow the seeds of republicanism further across the Caribbean, according to Drayton.

"This will have consequences particularly within the English-speaking Caribbean," said Drayton, who pointed to talk of a republic in both Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

"The queen has had an enormous personal relationship to many of these countries and has shown her own commitment to the Commonwealth vision which she inherited from that imperial moment of the 1940s and 1950s, so I do think that in the wake of the queen's passing that some of these questions would become more urgent in places like Canada and Australia."

The queen has made many visits to Barbados and, according to Buckingham Palace, has had "a unique relationship with this, the most easterly of the Caribbean islands".

	<p>The republic of Barbados will be declared at a ceremony which begins late in the evening on Monday, Nov. 29 at the National Heroes Square in Bridgetown.</p> <p>"The time has come to fully leave our colonial past behind," Prime Minister Mia Mottley said in a 2020 speech prepared for Governor General Sandra Mason, who will replace Elizabeth as Barbados' head of state after being elected president.</p> <p>"This is the ultimate statement of confidence in who we are and what we are capable of achieving."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/24 WHO: Europe only region w/more Covid
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-pandemics-europe-united-nations-588768ad52034b08054be70ec353c909
GIST	<p>GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization said that coronavirus cases jumped by 11% in Europe in the last week, the only region in the world where COVID-19 has continued to increase since mid-October.</p> <p>In its weekly assessment of the pandemic released on Tuesday, the U.N. health agency said cases and deaths globally have risen by about 6%, with about 3.6 million new infections and 51,000 new deaths reported in the previous week.</p> <p>WHO's Europe director Dr. Hans Kluge warned that without urgent measures taken soon, the continent could see another 700,000 deaths by the spring.</p> <p>"The European region remains in the firm grip of the COVID-19 pandemic," Kluge said, calling for countries to increase vaccination and to take other control measures like masking and social distancing to avoid "the last resort of lockdowns."</p> <p>He noted that while more than 1 billion vaccine doses have been administered across WHO's European region, which stretches to central Asia, the range in vaccination coverage varies from 10% to 80%.</p> <p>In the last week, Austria, the Netherlands and Belgium have all adopted stricter measures including partial lockdowns to try to stem the latest surge of the coronavirus. Germany is also set to record more than 100,000 COVID-19 deaths this week, with some politicians now calling for a vaccine mandate, like the one ordered in Austria.</p> <p>Globally, WHO reported that COVID-19 in Southeast Asia and the Middle East dropped by 11% and 9% respectively.</p> <p>The biggest decrease in coronavirus deaths in the last week was seen in Africa, where fatalities fell by 30%, continuing a decreasing trend in COVID-19 that first began in late June.</p> <p>Although cases remained stable in the Americas, WHO said the number of deaths rose by about 19%.</p> <p>The agency said the easier-to-spread delta variant remains the predominant version of COVID-19 globally. Of the more than 840,000 sequences uploaded to the biggest publicly available database of viruses in the last week, about 99.8% were the delta variant.</p> <p>Other variants including mu, lambda and gamma made up fewer than 1% — although they continue to make up a significant proportion of sequences from Latin America.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/24 China cracks down on #MeToo movement
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SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/sports-china-media-crime-social-media-75efe52e2caae9d5bee9c73e7e16b073
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Huang Xueqin, who publicly supported a woman when she accused a professor of sexual assault, was arrested in September. Wang Jianbing, who helped women report sexual harassment, was detained along with her. Neither has been heard from since. Meanwhile, several other women’s rights activists have faced smear campaigns on social media and some have seen their accounts shuttered.</p> <p>When tennis star Peng Shuai disappeared from public view this month after accusing a senior Chinese politician of sexual assault, it caused an international uproar. But back in China, Peng is just one of several people — activists and accusers alike — who have been hustled out of view, charged with crimes or trolled and silenced online for speaking out about the harassment, violence and discrimination women face every day.</p> <p>When Huang helped spark a grassroots #MeToo movement in China in 2018, it gained fairly wide visibility and achieved some measure of success, including getting the civil code to define sexual harassment for the first time. But it was also met with stiff resistance from Chinese authorities, who are quick to counter any social movement they fear could challenge their hold on power. That crackdown has intensified this year, part of wider efforts to limit what’s acceptable in the public discourse.</p> <p>“They’re publicly excluding us from the legitimacy, from the legitimate public space,” said Lu Pin, an activist who now lives in the U.S. but is still active on women’s rights issues in China. “This society’s middle ground is disappearing.”</p> <p>In a sign of how threatening the #MeToo movement and activism on women’s rights is to Chinese authorities, many activists have been dismissed as tools of foreign interference — a label used to discredit their concerns as fabrications by China’s enemies meant to destabilize it.</p> <p>The ongoing crackdown has mostly targeted activists with little fame or clout and who often worked with marginalized groups.</p> <p>Huang and Wang both had a history of advocating for disadvantaged groups, and have been charged with subversion of state power, according to a friend of both activists who saw a notice sent to Wang’s family. He spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of police retaliation. Police in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou where the two were arrested did not respond to a faxed request for comment.</p> <p>The charge is vague and often used against political dissidents. Huang’s and Wang’s families have not heard from them since they were detained and are not able to contact them — another tactic often deployed in political cases.</p> <p>The #MeToo movement burst into view in China, when Huang helped a woman named Luo Xixi to publicly accused her professor at Beihang University of trying to force her to have sex with him. The university conducted an investigation and fired the scholar, who it said had violated professional ethics.</p> <p>Luo’s account inspired dozens of other women to come forward — all online. Thousands of students signed petitions and put pressure on their universities to address sexual violence. Women in other industries spoke up, leading to public discussions about the power imbalances between the sexes in many workplaces, the lack of justice for survivors of sexual violence, and the way gender can determine how one is treated in Chinese society.</p> <p>While that national conversation was unsettling for authorities from the beginning, efforts to counter activism on women’s issues have increased this year, including by nationalist, pro-government influencers, some of who seem to have the blessing of authorities and have been praised by state media.</p> <p>In a span of a few weeks in the spring, influencers with millions of followers launched a wave of attacks against women’s rights activists on Weibo, one of China’s leading social media platforms. They accused them of being anti-China and of being backed by foreign forces, without evidence. Such allegations have</p>

often been leveled at protest movements, including the pro-democracy one in Hong Kong that Beijing has relentlessly tried to stamp out.

By late April, roughly a dozen activists and nonprofits found their accounts restricted from posting temporarily or permanently suspended. It's not clear why in all cases, but one activist who had lost her account, Liang Xiaowen, shared a notice from Weibo that said her account had "shared illegal and harmful information."

Even Zhou Xiaoxuan, who accused well-known state TV host Zhu Jun of groping her when she was an intern and was once praised for her courage in speaking up, faced a campaign of harassment and can no longer post on her public-facing accounts.

On Weibo, users send her private messages such as, "Get out of China, I feel disgusting living with a type of person like you, on the same piece of land." Another called her a piece of "toilet paper" that "foreigners would use and then throw away."

The effect is such that any discussion about the harassment, violence or inequalities that women face has been increasingly shielded from the public view.

"Now, the situation on social media is such that you have been completely sealed off, you have no way to speak," said Zhou.

The attacks have not been limited to the digital space. In September, when Zhou went to a court hearing in the civil case where she was suing Zhu for damages and an apology, a group of aggressive bystanders yelled at her and tried to prevent her from speaking to reporters. Police at the scene did not stop them.

Late that night, when Zhou left the courthouse and headed for home, she said she was followed by men in two cars. The men waited outside her residential complex for half an hour before leaving.

The pressure campaign also forced a low-profile group called Hot Pepper Tribe, which worked with female migrant workers, to shut down in August. The group had tried to raise awareness of the hardships faced by women who work in factories, construction and other manual labor fields. It had come under pressure from authorities, though it's not clear why it was singled out.

Still, activists are hopeful that the #MeToo movement has opened a door that cannot be shut.

"This is not so simple that you find a few feminist bloggers and you shut down their accounts," said Zhou. "Becoming a feminist comes from discovering what kind of problems you face. And once you become a feminist, then it's very hard to give it up. And #MeToo's very important meaning is that it has inspired a broad feminist community."

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HEADLINE	11/24 Israel, Morocco sign defense deal
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-africa-israel-morocco-rabat-d8d0b925991fe9f544773a7be555ab3a
GIST	<p>RABAT, Morocco (AP) — Israel and Morocco signed a landmark agreement Wednesday that lays the foundation for security cooperation, intelligence sharing, and future arms sales.</p> <p>The memorandum of understanding is the centerpiece of a visit this week by Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz to Morocco, which established formal relations with Israel last year as part of the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords.</p> <p>Gantz's trip is the first official visit by an Israeli defense minister to one of the Arab states that normalized ties under the accords.</p>

In a statement, Gantz said that the agreement was “very significant and will allow us to exchange ideas, enter joint projects and enable Israeli military exports here.”

The agreement was signed during a meeting between Gantz and his Moroccan counterpart Abdellatif Loudiyi in Rabat, with military attaches and two Israeli parliament members in attendance. Gantz also met with the Moroccan military chief of staff, and was greeted by a color guard of soldiers clad in red tunics, blue slacks and gleaming gold epaulets.

Ahead of his meeting with Loudiyi, Gantz paid his respects at the tomb of Mohamed V, the grandfather of the reigning monarch.

Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan signed agreements to normalize relations with Israel in 2020 as part of the Abraham Accords, which were brokered by the Trump administration.

Israel and Morocco enjoyed low-level diplomatic relations in the 1990s, but Morocco severed them after a Palestinian uprising erupted in 2000. Despite that, the two states have maintained informal relations. Nearly half a million Israelis claim Moroccan heritage — more than 200,000 immigrated to Israel after the founding of the state in 1948 — and thousands visit the country each year.

Morocco is still home to a small Jewish community, and Rabat has one remaining synagogue, where Gantz will visit at the close of his two-day trip.

In exchange for Morocco normalizing relations with Israel, the Trump administration promised in December 2020 to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, a disputed north African territory. The announcement upset decades of U.S. policy and international consensus that Western Sahara’s status should be settled by a U.N. referendum.

Since then, the Biden administration has cautiously walked back that recognition.

The Abraham Accords broke a longstanding consensus among Arab states that normalization with Israel only take place as part of a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Because of that, the Palestinians view the agreements as a betrayal that eroded their leverage with Israel.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Russia, China approve military cooperation
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/us-bomber-flights-prompt-russia-china-announce-military-cooperation-1652653
GIST	<p>Russia and China approved of a roadmap on Tuesday that aims to improve the military relationship between the two countries, the Associated Press reported.</p> <p>Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chinese Minister of National Defense Wei Fenghe met on a video call to discuss the partnership. The two countries "expressed a shared interest in stepping up strategic military exercises and joint patrols," according to the Russian Defense Ministry.</p> <p>"China and Russia have been strategic partners for many years," Shoigu said. "Today, in conditions of increasing geopolitical turbulence and growing conflict potential in various parts of the world, the development of our interaction is especially relevant."</p> <p>The announcement comes as the number of U.S. strategic bombers has increased along the borders of Russia and China. Shoigu said the bombers have come as close as 20 kilometers, or 12 miles, to the Russian border over the past month. Meanwhile, similar flights have occurred over the Sea of Okhotsk.</p> <p>"In such an environment," Shoigu said, "the Russian-Chinese coordination becomes a stabilizing factor in global affairs."</p>

	<p>The partnership has been sought by Russian President Vladimir Putin since 2014 after Moscow annexed the Crimea Peninsula. Putin said in 2020 that a military alliance such as this should not be ruled out and that China had helped Russia boost its military.</p> <p>The roadmap signed by Shoigu and Wei lasts until at least 2025.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/24 China's disappearing ships
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/24/business/china-shipping-data-mic-intl-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>Hong Kong (CNN Business)Ships in Chinese waters are disappearing from industry tracking systems, creating yet another headache for the global supply chain. China's growing isolation from the rest of the world — along with a deepening mistrust of foreign influence — may be to blame.</p> <p>Analysts say they started noticing the drop-off in shipping traffic toward the end of October, as China prepared to enact legislation governing data privacy.</p> <p>Usually, shipping data companies are able to track ships worldwide because they are fitted with an Automatic Identification System, or AIS, transceiver.</p> <p>This system allows ships to send information — such as position, speed, course and name — to stations that are based along coastlines using high-frequency radio. If a ship is out of range of those stations, the information can be exchanged via satellite.</p> <p>But that's not happening in the world's second-largest economy, a critical player in global trade. In the past three weeks, the number of vessels sending signals from the country has plunged by nearly 90%, according to data from the global shipping data provider VesselsValue.</p> <p>"We are currently seeing an industry wide reduction in terrestrial AIS signals in China," said Charlotte Cook, head trade analyst at VesselsValue.</p> <p>New data law could worsen supply chain chaos</p> <p>Asked about the issue, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined to comment. The State Council Information Office, which acts as a press office for the country's cabinet, did not immediately respond to a request for comment about why shipping providers were losing access to data.</p> <p>But analysts think they've found the culprit: China's Personal Information Protection Law, which took effect November 1. It requires companies that process data to receive approval from the Chinese government before they can let personal information leave Chinese soil — a rule that reflects the fear in Beijing that such data could end up in the hands of foreign governments.</p> <p>The law doesn't mention shipping data. But Chinese data providers might be withholding information as a precaution, according to Anastassis Touros, AIS network team leader at Marine Traffic, a major ship-tracking information provider.</p> <p>"Whenever you have a new law, we have a time period where everyone needs to check out if things are okay, " Touros said.</p> <p>Other industry experts have more clues of the law's influence. Cook said that colleagues in China told her that some AIS transponders were removed from stations based along Chinese coastlines at the start of the month, at the instruction of national security authorities. The only systems allowed to remain needed to be installed by "qualified parties."</p> <p>Not all of the data is gone: Satellites can still be used to capture signals from ships. But Touros said that when a ship is close to shore, the information collected in space is not as good as what can be gathered on the ground.</p>

"We need terrestrial stations in order to have a better picture, a more high-quality picture," he added.

With Christmas approaching, a loss of information from mainland China — home to six of the world's 10 busiest container ports — could create more problems for an already troubled global shipping industry. [Supply chains have been under strain](#) this year as badly congested ports struggle to keep up with a rapidly rebounding demand for goods.

Shipping firms rely on AIS data to predict vessel movement, track seasonal trends and improve port efficiency, according to Cook from VesselsValue. She said the lack of Chinese data "could significantly impact ocean supply chain visibility across China." The country is one of the world's major importers of coal and iron ore, as well as a huge exporter of containers.

"As we move into the Christmas period, it will have a really big impact on [supply chains] and this is the most important element right now," said Georgios Hatzimanolis, media strategist for Marine Traffic. He expects the loss of "minute by minute" ship data from China to have "a great impact on the supply chain," since companies may lose crucial information about ship docking, unloading and leaving times.

The global supply chain is already under "great stress," he added. "It doesn't need another factor to make it more difficult."

China's self-isolation

China's desire to retain absolute control over all data and information within its borders isn't surprising, as President Xi Jinping continues to reassert the ruling Communist Party's dominance in every aspect of the economy and society.

The country has been pushing for economic self-sufficiency as it faces external threats, such as US sanctions on [key technologies](#).

Xi emphasized his self-reliance goals in the years before and during [a bitter trade and tech war](#) with former US President Donald Trump. That's the point, for example, of ["Made in China 2025,"](#) an ambitious plan to push China's manufacturing sector into more advanced technological fields.

Some top officials in Beijing have recently tried to quell concerns among global investors that the country is isolating itself from the rest of the world as it prioritizes national security.

Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan, considered a trusted ally of Xi, told the Bloomberg New Economy Forum in Singapore that China would not "develop isolated from the world." Speaking via video, he also called on countries to keep supply chains "stable and smooth."

But China has embraced policies during the coronavirus pandemic that often appear to do otherwise.

For example, during the pandemic Xi has doubled down on his push for self-reliance, stressing the need to create ["independent and controllable" supply chains](#) to ensure national security.

And the country's sweeping clampdown on tech [extended this summer](#) to foreign IPOs, when the Cyberspace Administration of China [proposed](#) that major companies with more than a million customers seek approval before listing shares overseas. As with the recent data privacy law, the agency cited concerns about whether personal data held by those companies could be exploited by foreign governments.

China's actions this year may come at a cost, though, if the country goes too far in its attempt to protect itself from perceived foreign interference.

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SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2021-11-23/alex-jones-roger-stone-subpoenaed-by-house-jan-6-committee
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection issued more subpoenas Tuesday, this time to extremist organizations, including the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers as well as their leaders, in an attempt to uncover the plotting and execution of the deadly attack.</p> <p>“The Select Committee is seeking information from individuals and organizations reportedly involved with planning the attack, with the violent mob that stormed the Capitol on January 6th, or with efforts to overturn the results of the election,” Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, the Democratic chairman of the panel, said in a statement.</p> <p>The subpoenas are the latest in a wide net the House panel has cast in an effort to investigate the riot, when supporters of former President Donald Trump, fueled by his false claims of a stolen election, assaulted police and smashed their way into the Capitol to interrupt the certification of Democrat Joe Biden’s victory.</p> <p>The committee has already interviewed more than 150 people across government, social media and law enforcement, including some former Trump aides who have been cooperative. The panel has subpoenaed more than 20 witnesses, and most of them, including several who helped plan the “Stop the Steal” rally the morning of Jan. 6, have signaled they will cooperate.</p> <p>The latest subpoenas were issued to the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys and 1st Amendment Praetorian organizations as well as their members, requesting documents and testimony.</p> <p>Henry “Enrique” Tarrío, chairman of the Proud Boys, was among those subpoenaed. He hasn’t been charged in the riot as he wasn’t there on Jan. 6. He’d been arrested in an unrelated vandalism case as he arrived in Washington two days earlier and was ordered out of the area by a judge. Law enforcement later said Tarrío was picked up in part to help quell potential violence.</p> <p>But despite him not being physically present, the committee believes he may have been involved in the Proud Boys’ preparation for the events at the Capitol.</p> <p>The committee highlighted a line from another Proud Boys leader’s podcast shortly before Jan. 6 in which he said, “When police officers or government officials are breaking the law, what are we supposed to do as people? Discourse? What are we supposed to do debate? No, we have to use force.”</p> <p>Jason Lee Van Dyke, a lawyer previously affiliated with the Proud Boys and subpoenaed as part of the congressional investigation, said he would give the committee records that aren’t protected by attorney-client privilege, but emphasized that his affiliation with the Proud Boys International LLC ended in November 2018.</p> <p>Van Dyke added that he didn’t have any records from November 2020 through the present that the subpoena seeks. “I can’t give them what I don’t have,” Van Dyke said.</p> <p>More than 30 Proud Boys leaders, members or associates are among those who have been charged in connection with the attack. The group of self-described “Western chauvinists” emerged from far-right fringes during the Trump administration to join mainstream GOP circles, with allies like longtime Trump backer Roger Stone. The group claims it has more than 30,000 members nationwide.</p> <p>The committee on Tuesday also subpoenaed the Oath Keepers — a militia group founded in 2009 that recruits current and former military, police and first responders — and its founder and leader Elmer Stewart Rhodes. The panel says Rhodes may have suggested members should engage in violence to ensure their preferred election outcome and that he was in contact with several of the more than a dozen indicted Oath Keepers members before, during and after the Capitol attack, including meeting some of them outside the Capitol.</p>

	<p>Rhodes has said there were as many as 40,000 Oath Keepers at its peak, but one extremism expert estimates the group's membership stands around 3,000 nationally. Rhodes didn't immediately respond to a request for comment that was left on the organization's website.</p> <p>The last organization on the committee's list Tuesday was the 1st Amendment Praetorian, founded by a QAnon believer, which claims to provide free security for "patriotic and religious events across the country."</p> <p>Its chairman, Robert Patrick Lewis, is wanted by the committee after being listed as a speaker on the permit for a Jan. 5 rally on Freedom Plaza in downtown Washington. On the day of the attack, Lewis tweeted: "Today is the day that true battles begin."</p> <p>The subpoenas narrowing in on the organizations come one day after the panel issued subpoenas to five more people, including Stone and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones.</p> <p>Some Trump allies have not cooperated. Steve Bannon, a longtime ally, was indicted on Nov. 12 on two counts of criminal contempt of Congress after he defied a subpoena from the House committee. The committee is giving former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows more time to comply with a subpoena before moving forward with a contempt vote.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 'Militant': parade killings start of 'revolution'
SOURCE	https://klewtelevision.com/news/nation-world/blm-activist-militant-says-parade-killings-might-be-beginning-of-the-revolution-waukesha-red-van-suv-black-lives-matter-christmas-wisconsin-darrell-brooks-vaun-mayes-facebook-live-kyle-rittenhouse
GIST	<p>MILWAUKEE (TND) - A self-proclaimed "militant" who apparently supports "Black Lives Matter" took to social media to say the incident at a Christmas parade in Waukesha, Wisconsin may be the start of a "revolution".</p> <p>39-year-old Darrell Brooks, a black man, is suspected of being behind the wheel of the SUV which barreled through the parade. He is due to appear in court on Tuesday.</p> <p>Five people were killed and almost 50 were injured by the SUV. Authorities have yet to release any information which points to a clear motivation for the violence.</p> <p>Vaun Mayes, who describes himself in his Twitter bio as a community activist, battle rapper, militant, and tattoo artist, among other titles, said on a Facebook Live on Monday "it sounds possible that the revolution has started in Wisconsin. It started with this Christmas parade."</p> <p>The Facebook Live was apparently filmed at the scene where the SUV crashed into the parade.</p> <p>A report from Fox News says Mayes is a "well-known activist in Milwaukee". Looking at Mayes' Twitter profile, he has included several pro-BLM tags in his bio, including #BlackLivesMatter.</p> <p>Mayes offers his knowledge on the matter in his Facebook Live, but also said to his audience he was not going to "speak on no rumors".</p> <p>"I said I wasn't going to speak on no rumors. Y'all are repeating some of the stuff that... has come up. And I can tell you that the initial person who reached out to me said that they believe that this has to do with the verdict, and so I made an assumption of which side it would be from, but I don't know," Mayes says in the Facebook Live.</p> <p>The "verdict" Mayes mentions is undoubtedly the recent "not guilty" verdict in the Kyle Rittenhouse trial. Rittenhouse was facing murder charges for killing two protestors in Kenosha, Wis. The defense claimed</p>

	<p>Rittenhouse acted in self-defense when he shot and killed those two protestors. A jury found him not guilty on all counts.</p> <p>The National Desk has reached out to Mayes for further comment, but he has not responded at the time of this writing.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 US: vaccines for all border crossers in Jan.
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/us-to-require-vaccines-for-all-border-crossers-in-january/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will require essential, nonresident travelers crossing U.S. land borders, such as truck drivers, government and emergency response officials, to be fully vaccinated beginning on Jan. 22, the administration planned to announce.</p> <p>A senior administration official said the requirement, which the White House previewed in October, brings the rules for essential travelers in line with those that took effect earlier this month for leisure travelers, when the U.S. reopened its borders to fully vaccinated individuals.</p> <p>Essential travelers entering by ferry will also be required to be fully vaccinated by the same date, the official said. The official spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to preview the announcement.</p> <p>The rules pertain to non-U.S. nationals. American citizens and permanent residents may still enter the U.S. regardless of their vaccination status, but face additional testing hurdles because officials believe they more easily contract and spread COVID-19 and in order to encourage them to get a shot.</p> <p>The Biden administration pushed back the requirement for essential travelers by more than two months from when it went into effect on Nov. 8 for non-essential visitors to prevent disruptions, particularly among truck drivers who are vital to North American trade. While most cross-border traffic was shut down in the earliest days of the pandemic, essential travelers have been able to transit unimpeded.</p> <p>Even with the delay, though, Norita Taylor, spokeswoman for the trucking group Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, criticized the vaccination requirement, calling it an example of “how unnecessary government mandates can force experienced owner-operators and independent truckers out of business.”</p> <p>“These requirements are another example of how impractical regulations will send safe drivers off the road,” she said.</p> <p>The latest deadline is beyond the point by which the Biden administration hopes to have large businesses require their employees to be vaccinated or tested weekly under an emergency regulation issued by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration. That rule is now delayed by litigation, but the White House has encouraged businesses to implement their own mandates regardless of the federal requirement with the aim of boosting vaccination.</p> <p>About 47 million adults in the U.S. remain unvaccinated, according to figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 President's helicopter setback: unreliable
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/presidents-new-copter-hits-setback-its-unreliable-in-a-crisis/
GIST	<p>Joe Biden's first flight on the new presidential helicopter built by Lockheed Martin is being delayed after a report by the Pentagon's testing unit warned that it's not yet “operationally suitable” or sufficiently reliable — especially in an emergency.</p>

The Biden administration hasn't yet determined if the helicopter can be put into operation because it's still assessing its safety, according to a U.S. official who asked not to be identified discussing the internal deliberations. The White House Military Office will determine the timeline.

The helicopter is "failing to meet the reliability, availability or maintainability threshold requirements" set for it, according to an internal summary prepared for senior defense officials by the Pentagon testing office and obtained by Bloomberg News.

The VH-92 helicopter program is a \$5 billion, 23-aircraft program to replace the current aging fleet used by the president and other top officials. The previously unpublished testing report, dated Sept. 28, said the aircraft is "operationally effective" for routine "administrative" missions like a run to Camp David or delivering the president to Joint Base Andrews outside Washington for a preplanned trip on Air Force One.

But it wasn't effective "for the contingency operation mission," a reference to emergency flights. The "Mission Communication System (MCS) often delayed critical communications at the beginning of contingency missions and did not adequately support timely, continuous and secure communications," the test office found.

The Naval Air Systems Command's program office stamped the 28-page testing report "Controlled Unclassified Information," a new label being used increasingly by the military services to restrict the public dissemination of program cost and performance data.

"The VH-92 report was marked CUI to protect critical technical information and operational security," Captain Clay Doss, a Navy spokesman, said in a statement. "An unclassified/releasable synopsis will be included in" the Pentagon test office's annual report, he said. That report is typically published in January.

With its emblematic "white top" paint job, Marine One — its designation when the president is on board — is almost as much a symbol of the American presidency as the Air Force One jetliner. Crowds of reporters and White House guests regularly gather to see the president depart and return aboard the helicopter. The current fleet entered duty in 1975, with a newer model added in 1989. Earlier plans for a replacement from Lockheed were canceled in 2009 after that program was plagued by soaring costs and schedule delays.

The Marines, in coordination with the White House Military Office, had planned to declare in July that the helicopter had an "Initial Operational Capability." That already was a delay from June 2020 and then January. That designation would have been followed by the military office assigning missions. Neither has happened.

The Pentagon's Director of Operational Test and Evaluation assessed the helicopter's performance during three months of testing ending April 15. Marine Corps Major General Gregory Masiello, the program manager, told a Navy audience on Aug. 3 that "the squadron and the program are ready today."

The Marine test squadron flew 18 sorties over 131 flight hours with scenarios inside and outside the National Capital Region, including to Camp David, to assess the chopper's basic operational effectiveness and maintenance capability. Jessica Maxwell, a spokeswoman for the testing office, said in an email that the flight tests were designed to answer the question: Is it "effective and suitable to perform transport of the President, Vice President, cabinet members and heads of state?"

The test office declined to answer any questions about the results because they were deemed "controlled unclassified information," Maxwell said.

Mission Communications System "instability, cabin interior flaws, frequent maintenance inspections and rear air-stair door components contributed to low aircraft availability," the test office concluded. The lack

	<p>of a “communication system diagnostic capability” at the squadron level “and time required to access” communication system components “hampered the squadron’s ability to maintain the aircraft,” it said.</p> <p>In addition, the VH-92 program office still hasn’t solved the problem of the new helicopter potentially scorching the grass in the landing zone on the White House South Lawn. Spinning rotors and engine exhaust cause scorching in limited circumstances that first occurred in September 2018.</p> <p>“Engine exhaust and fluid discharge cause landing zone damage limitations, limiting the number of available landing zones,” according to the summary. The Marines should “continue to reduce effects of engine exhaust and fluid discharges.”</p> <p>Megan Wasel, a spokeswoman for the program office said it “continues to work closely” with the Marine Corps and the White House Military Office “to execute a seamless transition from the current in-service” copter to the VH-92. Bethesda, Maryland-based Lockheed has been provided the test report, Wasel said.</p> <p>“The report did not raise any issues” that the program office and Marine Corps “were unaware of, or the issues were previously corrected,” said Major Jorge Hernandez, spokesman for the Marine aviation deputy commandant. The office “cannot speculate as to when” the White House will give approval to start missions, he said.</p> <p>John Dorrian, a spokesman for Lockheed’s Sikorsky aircraft division, said “we are pleased our customer awarded us a contract for the final five production helicopters” in February. He said “Sikorsky continues to work closely with our customer to ensure the aircraft meets all operational requirements.”</p> <p>The Navy placed the final batch of a total 23 production and test aircraft on contract on Feb. 5, three days before operational testing began. The service has already spent more than \$1.5 billion on the program.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/24 New Zealand towns to tourists: stay away
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/24/as-new-zealand-lifts-covid-lockdowns-some-small-towns-ask-tourists-to-stay-away
GIST	<p>Every summer, with Christmas and New Year stacked in the middle of the hot season, city-dwelling New Zealanders pack their car boots and make for the beaches, festivals and campgrounds dotting the country’s coastlines and remote forests.</p> <p>As the country prepares to lift its last lockdowns, prime minister Jacinda Ardern has promised that the “classic kiwi summer” will roll on. But this year, there are fears that packed among their chilly bins and camping chairs, holidaymakers will bring other baggage – infectious particles of Covid-19, carried to communities ill-prepared to greet it. In the face of that prospect, leaders of some of New Zealand’s small towns and settlements have returned to prospective holidaymakers with a blunt message: please stay away.</p> <p>“At Christmas I will sit out here on my veranda, and I will watch literally hundreds and hundreds vehicles, just heading north,” says Hone Harawira, former parliamentary representative for Te Tai Tokerau, a region at the far northern tip of New Zealand. “If the doors are open, quite literally tens of thousands of Aucklanders will be coming – there’s nothing to stop anyone.”</p> <p>‘You may as well send up body bags’</p> <p>Auckland, the centre of New Zealand’s thousands-strong Covid outbreak, has been in a strict lockdown for nearly 100 days. As the region approaches 90% of eligible adults vaccinated, Ardern announced those restrictions would soon be lifted – and alongside them, the strict border that has prevented all non-essential travel in or out of the city. While that reprieve was greeted with relief and celebration by many Aucklanders, experts and community leaders say it could also send a huge influx of Covid-carrying Aucklanders around the country, seeding the virus in communities with far lower vaccination rates and fewer health resources.</p>

“You may as well send up body bags,” northern iwi [tribal] leaders said when the news was first announced. The area’s isolation and dramatic terrain – some of the very attributes that make it so attractive to holidaymakers – also make its population vulnerable to Covid outbreaks. The region is served by just a handful of ICU hospital beds, and many towns are an hours-long drive from the nearest health facilities. On top of that, vaccination rates – particularly among [Māori](#) – are lagging up to 30 percentage points behind Auckland.

“You’ve got to remember we don’t have the services or infrastructure to cope with a large outbreak,” says Antony Thompson, spokesperson for Te Kahu o Taonui, a collective of 12 iwi in the north.

“Right now we’re just not ready, that’s all it is,” Harewira says. “Māori in Te Tai Tokerau [Northland] are currently 60% vaccinated. That’s a long, long way from the 90% that is the standard for Auckland.”

Harawira has spent months during the latest outbreak running checkpoints, or pou korero [talking posts] to ensure people entering the region aren’t in breach of Covid rules. Soon, however, most of those restrictions will be formally lifted. Without any backing from central government, he’s concerned that visitors will simply breeze on through. “As far as they’re concerned, to hell with the local yokels,” he says. “[People will say] we’ve got the keys to the north, we’ve been given the go-ahead by the prime minister herself, so get out of the way.”

“Unfortunately, I think the message being provided by government is go, go, go.”

While the government has indicated people need to be fully vaccinated or produce a negative test to leave the city, there isn’t any comprehensive system in place, beyond possible spot checks, to ensure that carloads of tourists are compliant.

“You’re going to see the virus seeded everywhere,” epidemiologist and public health prof Michael Baker said last week. Baker said the South Island may be better protected, given the requirements for vaccine passports on flights and ferries, but summer travel around the North Island was likely to lead to widespread transmission.

Thompson says spot checks will not be sufficient. “Thirty thousand cars leave Auckland on a daily basis during summer. Can you really honestly hand on heart say that you can pick up which cars ... don’t have vaccinated people in them?”

Inland, in Te Urewera, the North Island ex-national park now governed by Tūhoe, the tribe has said it will be closed to visitors until the end of January. “Te Urewera is unique,” said board chair Tāmati Kruger. “Unlike New Zealand’s national parks, it is the home of Tūhoe communities, including some of the country’s most remote and vulnerable populations during the current pandemic.”

But elsewhere, communities don’t have the option of simply closing private campgrounds or public roads. Instead, they’re relying on the goodwill of potential visitors: at the very least, be double vaccinated – and at best, consider delaying your summer road trip one more year. “I’d ask that [the rest of the country] join with me in a campaign to have Christmas moved to 25 January,” Harawira says. “If we hit 90% by then, we’ll open our arms to the nation. We’d welcome people here.”

“I live in Auckland, I’ve been going to the exact same thing every other Auckland has been going through,” Thompson says. “I’d love to go north, I’m from the north as well. But my family, we’ve made the conscious decision to stay home.”

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HEADLINE	11/23 EU threatens blacklist airlines: border influx
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/23/eu-threatens-to-blacklist-airlines-linked-to-border-influx

The EU has published a draft law that would blacklist airlines and travel operators that fly people to countries on its borders as part of attempts to destabilise the bloc, in its latest response to the crisis at the Poland-Belarus border.

The proposal does not specifically mention Belarus, whose authoritarian leader, [Alexander Lukashenko](#), is accused of engineering the arrival of thousands of people at the Polish border, where a desperate humanitarian situation has played out in recent weeks.

Companies could be banned from flying through the EU and landing and refuelling at EU airports, regardless of whether their involvement in attempts at destabilisation was intentional or not. The proposal closes a gap in EU sanctions laws, which are country-specific.

The EU recently agreed to [extend sanctions against Belarus](#), but it can only target Belarusian companies rather than foreign airlines involved in bringing people to Minsk from the Middle East.

Ylva Johansson, the EU home affairs commissioner, said the law was needed in response to an unprecedented situation. She said Lukashenko was “trying to sell tickets to the EU”, charging people €10,000-€20,000 for a one-way trip to Minsk and onward travel to the EU border.

“We see the need to reach out directly to those travel companies which – unintentionally, most of the time – are being part of a state-sponsored smuggling scheme orchestrated by a desperate and non-democratic regime,” Johansson said.

European Commission officials believe much of the value of the law lies in the power to deter companies from getting involved in such schemes. “Hopefully we don’t need to use it,” Johansson said, adding that it had taken airline companies “some time to understand how they are being used”.

Turkish Airlines and Iraqi Airways restricted flights to Minsk after EU officials began talks with Middle Eastern governments on the issue.

Speaking to the European parliament, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said the situation on the EU’s eastern border was “not a migration crisis, but an attempt by an authoritarian regime to try and destabilise its democratic neighbours”.

“These migrants are being cheated by terrible false promises. We have to fight against this and that’s why we wish to establish a blacklist for all modes and means of transport on the basis of international legislation.”

She urged MEPs to support the proposals to make sure they were approved quickly.

The proposal also has to be approved by EU ministers.

Belarus’s interior ministry announced that more people would leave the country on Tuesday, after 122 left on Monday.

Lukashenko admitted in a recent [interview with the BBC](#) that it was “absolutely possible” that Belarusian state troops had helped people cross the border into Poland, although he denied being responsible for the crisis.

Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis who have managed to cross the border and reach the Polish city of Białystok have told the Guardian they bought visa travel packages from agencies that appeared to be [closely connected to the Belarusian authorities](#).

Since the crisis began, about 7,500 people from the Middle East have reached Lithuania, Latvia and [Poland](#) via Belarus, and 8,000 have arrived in Germany from Belarus via Poland, according to EU officials.

	<p>Last month Poland’s parliament passed a law allowing border guards to return asylum seekers across the border without hearing their asylum claims.</p> <p>Johannson, a Swedish Social Democrat responsible for the EU’s migration policy, said the commission had “issues” with the Polish law. “We think there are elements of this law that are not compliant with the EU acquis,” she said.</p> <p>Under the Geneva conventions, refugees cannot be penalised for illegal border crossings.</p> <p>People stuck in the no man’s land between the EU and Belarus have spoken of being pushed between both countries, denied entry to Poland and return to Belarus. Asked about widespread reports of pushbacks, Johannsson said this was not EU policy. “We are not allowing pushbacks. We will not allow pushbacks.”</p> <p>She added: “We should not legalise pushbacks, but it’s also important to say member states are obliged to prevent unauthorised entries. Sometimes the debate is a bit black or white. We have to do both. We do not have free entry to the European Union ... We have to protect our external border but we have to do it in a way that is compliant with European values.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Thanksgiving travel challenges airlines
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/23/thanksgiving-travel-airports-staffing-cancelations
GIST	<p>Maliha Aziz was understandably nervous about her 19 November trip from St Louis, Missouri, to her native city of Karachi, Pakistan, for her nephew’s wedding.</p> <p>Aziz, a former principal of an Islamic Sunday school in St Louis, and her husband traveled to three weddings over the summer and experienced numerous flights delays and cancelations.</p> <p>On a Friday in June, they were stuck at a gate at the St Louis airport for more than two hours and missed a rehearsal dinner in Omaha. Then while at the wedding, Aziz received a text informing her that the airline had canceled their return flight and rebooked them for a flight more than 24 hours later.</p> <p>“None of those were pleasant trips,” said Aziz, 61, who lives in a St Louis suburb. “Even simple trips, when they should not have any problems, either they did not have enough crew to fly the plane, or the plane is there but they don’t have enough staffing, or the luggage is in the plane, and it can’t come out because they don’t have enough staffing.”</p> <p>Aziz’s summer travel experience and worries about Thanksgiving – she is flying back to the US on 28 November – are not unique among the tens of millions of people hoping to see friends and family for the annual holiday.</p> <p>That’s because while people are expected to again travel at levels similar to a pre-pandemic Thanksgiving, airlines are still contending with staffing shortages, which could lead to additional flight cancelations.</p> <p>“It doesn’t really matter if a travel disruption is coming from a lack of staffing or shortage of routes or weather, it’s still something that is very frustrating for customers,” said Lindsey Roeschke, travel and hospitality analyst for the Morning Consult, a market research firm.</p> <p>In spite of the Covid-19 pandemic, Thanksgiving flight bookings in the United States are up 78% from 2020 and 3.2% from 2019, according to an Adobe Digital Economy Index report published earlier this month.</p> <p>“When it is busy, it’s very possible that [flights] will be over capacity – and that means the possibility of things going wrong is very high,” said Narendra Khatri, principal of Insubuy, a travel insurance company.</p>

Over the Halloween weekend, American Airlines canceled more than 2,000 flights because of weather and staffing problems. In letters to employees, David Seymour, chief operating officer of the airline, described the weekend as a “brief irregular ops period” and said that “on the schedule front, we’ve ensured that November and December are built to meet customer demand and that they are fully supportable by our staffing”.

Southwest Airlines also canceled hundreds of flights over an October weekend.

Both airlines have since offered staff increased pay to work over Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s.

A union representing American Airlines flight attendants accepted an offer for 150% pay to fly during peak holiday periods and an additional 150% pay for attendants who do not call in sick between 15 November and 2 January.

But a union representing American Airlines pilots rejected an offer for 50% additional pay on peak travel days during the holiday season because of the pilots’ frustrations with the airline’s scheduling system, among other issues.

When weather forces a cancellation, the airline has struggled to fix the schedule, which has spiraled into further cancellations, said Dennis Tajer, a spokesperson for Allied Pilots Association, the union for the airline’s pilots.

The union would like to see the airline allow pilots more flexibility to swap flights so that when a pilot’s flight from St Louis to Dallas is canceled, a pilot already in Texas can pick up that pilot’s next flight from Dallas. That often can’t happen because of issues in the information technology system and limits on how much a pilot can fly each month, Tajer said.

An American Airlines spokesperson declined a request for an interview.

“This recovery has just really pulled back the covers on the infrastructure problems at American Airlines,” said Tajer, who is also a pilot. “We know where the solutions are – they probably have solutions – but they are not even willing to talk about them.”

In spite of the uncertainty, not all analysts predict that Thanksgiving will be a mess.

In the wake of the Halloween weekend cancellations, Seymour reassured staff that almost 1,800 flight attendants had returned from a leave of absence and that the airline would hire 600 new flight attendants by the end of December.

Mike Malik, chief marketing officer at Cirium, an aviation data firm, attributes the airlines’ October meltdowns to the fact that some companies “wound down too fast” when air traffic slowed. As people have again begun traveling, they are still working through difficulties in trying to meet that demand, he said.

“The hits that have been taken in the last month or so, the airlines have adjusted for that, and I think they are very much geared up for Thanksgiving,” said Malik.

Ajay Jain, a 23-year-old software engineer, also has confidence in American Airlines despite the recent issues. He follows the industry closely through social media and websites such as the Points Guy and has seven flights booked with the airline before the end of the year, with the goal of achieving Gold status for 2022, meaning he would receive free upgrades.

He has flown about 30 times since he started traveling again after being fully vaccinated against Covid-19 and has not had any flights canceled. But in May, he missed an American Airlines flight from Austin to Dallas when an airline reservation system operated by Sabre, a technology company, went down.

Jain was able to catch a flight an hour later, but other passengers' plans were more disrupted. Jain said he explained to some what had happened, that it wasn't American Airlines' fault, and they calmed down.

That hasn't always been the case during the pandemic – and the hectic holiday scene at airports could prove especially volatile. Passengers have yelled at and assaulted flight attendants when asked to put their mask on. Others have spent hours on the phone trying to rebook cancelled flights.

In the end Aziz, the former Sunday school principal, and her husband made it to Karachi without any problems. They were looking forward to the wedding, even though it would have only about 200 people – compared with more than 700 for her Pakistani family's weddings in non-Covid times. Before their return flight 28 November, they must figure out where to get a Covid test, as is required for passengers entering the US.

"Praying we won't miss our flight from Chicago to [St Louis]," Aziz texted from Pakistan.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Alarm grows over escalating Ethiopia war
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/23/alarm-grows-over-escalating-ethiopia-war-as-more-foreign-citizens-told-to-flee
GIST	<p>International alarm mounted on Tuesday over the escalating war in Ethiopia as Tigrayan rebels said they were edging closer to the capital, Addis Ababa, and more foreign citizens were told to leave.</p> <p>The US envoy Jeffrey Feltman spoke of some progress in efforts to reach a diplomatic settlement to end the year-long conflict but said it risked being jeopardised by "alarming developments" on the ground.</p> <p>France became the latest country to tell its citizens to get out of Ethiopia, while the UN has ordered the immediate evacuation of family members of international staff, according to an internal document seen by AFP on Tuesday.</p> <p>The rebel Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) said this week it had taken a town just 135 miles (220km) from the capital, although the claims are hard to verify because of a communications blackout.</p> <p>On Monday, the prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, said he would head to the battlefield to lead his soldiers in what the government has described as an "existential war" in Africa's second most populous nation. "We are now in the final stages of saving Ethiopia," said Abiy, who only two years ago was awarded the Nobel peace prize for securing a peace deal with neighbouring Eritrea.</p> <p>The latest developments cast doubt on hopes of a peaceful solution to the conflict, despite frantic diplomatic efforts, led by the African Union, to secure a ceasefire.</p> <p>Thousands of people have been killed since the fighting erupted in northern Ethiopia in November 2020, triggering a humanitarian crisis that the UN says has brought hundreds of thousands of people to the brink of famine, and displaced more than 2 million.</p> <p>"While there's some nascent progress, that is highly at risk of being outpaced by the military escalation on the two sides," Feltman, special envoy for the Horn of Africa, told reporters in Washington after returning from Addis Ababa.</p> <p>A scramble to evacuate foreigners was continuing, three weeks after the government declared a state of emergency. An internal UN security order said "eligible family members of internationally recruited staff" should be evacuated by 25 November. France also advised its citizens to leave "without delay", while the US and the UK have issued similar advisories in recent weeks.</p>

But officials in the capital told diplomats that security forces, including youth groups, were working to ensure the city's safety. "The propaganda and terror talk being disseminated by the western media fully contradicts the peaceful state of the city on the ground, so the diplomatic community shouldn't feel any worry or fear," said Kenea Yadeta, head of the Addis Ababa peace and security bureau.

The conflict erupted when Abiy sent troops into the northern Tigray region to topple the TPLF after months of tensions with the party, which had dominated national politics for three decades before he took power in 2018.

Abiy said this was in response to TPLF attacks on federal army camps and promised a swift victory, but by late June the rebels had retaken most of Tigray, including its capital, Mekelle. Since then the TPLF has pushed into the neighbouring regions of Afar and Amhara, and earlier this week claimed control of Shewa Robit, just 140 miles north-east of Addis Ababa by road.

The government has not responded to questions about who was controlling the town.

Some TPLF fighters were also believed to have reached Debre Sina, about 19 miles closer to Addis Ababa, diplomats said.

In Pretoria, the South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, and his Kenyan counterpart, Uhuru Kenyatta, added their voices to calls for the two sides to commit to an immediate ceasefire.

But Abiy has cast doubt on the prospects for a peaceful solution. "Starting tomorrow, I will mobilise to the front to lead the defence forces," he said on Monday. "Those who want to be among the Ethiopian children who will be hailed by history, rise up for your country today. Let's meet at the front."

Meanwhile, the UN on Tuesday launched a drive to bring food aid to two towns in northern Ethiopia, despite the looting of warehouses. The UN's World Food Programme said the "major food assistance operation" would serve more than 450,000 people during the next two weeks in the Amhara towns of Kombolcha and Dessie, which lie at a strategic crossroads on the main highway to Addis Ababa.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Travelers face high gas prices, long lines
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/thanksgiving-travelers-will-face-high-gas-prices-long-lines-11637691679?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>Gas prices remain high as millions of Americans take to the roads and sky this week to meet family and friends for Thanksgiving celebrations, according to AAA.</p> <p>The national average price for a gallon of regular unleaded gas is \$3.40, according to AAA's weekly gas report.</p> <p>Gasoline prices have risen steadily over the past year and have become a big contributor to inflation, which is at its highest rate in 31 years. Pump prices are up 61% from a year ago, according to Energy Department data, as oil-and-gas production lags behind a return of consumer demand coming out of the pandemic.</p> <p>In an effort to bring down prices, the U.S. plans to tap national strategic petroleum reserves, in a coordinated release with five other countries, senior Biden administration officials said Tuesday.</p> <p>"The price of crude oil accounts for about 50%-60% of what consumers pay at the pump, so a lower oil price should translate into better gasoline prices for drivers," said Andrew Gross, a AAA spokesman.</p> <p>The most expensive state for gasoline remains California, where a gallon of regular unleaded averages \$4.70, followed by Hawaii at \$4.34, according to the automobile association. Many other Western states,</p>

like Nevada, Washington, Oregon and Arizona round out the top 10 most expensive markets. Alaska, Utah, Idaho and Pennsylvania make up the last four states on the list.

The high price at the pump comes as Thanksgiving travel returns to near pre-pandemic levels. An estimated 48.3 million people will be traveling this week by car, up from 44.5 million in 2020 and just below 49.9 million that traveled before the pandemic, in 2019, according to an October AAA report.

The most substantial increase in movement would be in air travel. AAA forecasts that 4.2 million people will fly between Wednesday, Nov. 24, and Sunday, Nov. 28, compared with 2.3 million in 2020. The Transportation Security Administration said it expects to screen about 20 million passengers from Friday, Nov. 19, through Sunday, Nov. 28.

Last year, with severe Covid-19 outbreaks hitting parts of the U.S. and no vaccine yet authorized, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [strongly urged Americans not to travel](#) for Thanksgiving. This year, with many Americans fully vaccinated against the disease, the [CDC has issued basic guidelines](#) on how to travel and celebrate holidays safely, including traveling only if fully vaccinated and wearing masks.

AAA, in its report, noted that the number of Thanksgiving travelers could change based on shifts in the pandemic. “If there is an increase in reported COVID-19 cases, some people may decide to stay home, while others may note the progress in vaccinations and make last-minute decisions to travel,” the association said.

Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations have been [moving higher again](#) in some parts of the U.S., including in New England and the upper Midwest. The national seven-day average for newly reported cases rose to 95,060 on Monday, up from 92,375 a day earlier and 73,849 a month ago, according to a Wall Street Journal analysis of data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. The number of Covid-19 deaths recorded in 2021 [recently surpassed](#) the toll in 2020.

Nearly 63% of Americans aged 5 and older are fully vaccinated against Covid-19, [according to CDC data](#). Thanksgiving travel will be a [test for airlines](#), which have faced operational challenges in recent months as demand for air travel continues to increase. Those issues have been compounded by a rise in [unruly behavior among some passengers](#) and by bad weather. But forecasts of inclement weather over Thanksgiving week—[which were a concern last week](#)—have dissipated.

Two storms are expected to arrive in the Pacific Northwest later this week, adding to a series of rain storms that have wreaked havoc in some parts of the region in recent weeks. But “in much of the country, the weather is not expected to create extra headaches for holiday travelers,” said Jonathan Porter, chief meteorologist for AccuWeather.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Puget Sound ‘continuous onslaught of rain’
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3249040/puget-sound-region-continuous-onslaught-rain-thanksgiving/
GIST	<p>We could be in for a blustery, wet Thanksgiving holiday weekend across the Puget Sound region.</p> <p>The National Weather Service is keeping an eye on three separate atmospheric rivers that could bring a near-constant stream of heavy rain over the next week. That will likely kick off between Wednesday and Thursday, although it’s unclear whether the brunt of it will arrive in Western Washington or further north.</p> <p>“There’ll be a large pool of moisture aimed somewhere at the Pacific Northwest, whether it is targeted north into Canada or across our area remains to be seen,” NWS meteorologist Matthew Cullen told KIRO Radio.</p> <p>Rivers are expected to rise again as well, but Cullen notes that it will “not be of the magnitude we saw with that major flooding recently.”</p>

	<p>After that, he says a second system is poised to arrive by the tail end of the holiday weekend.</p> <p>“There could be another round of fairly heavy rain that could linger for a period of time,” Cullen predicted, estimating that it could arrive by late Saturday.</p> <p>That will all operate as part of what the NWS describes as “a continuous onslaught of rain,” with parts of Washington potentially getting over five inches of rainfall across a seven day period beginning on Tuesday of this week.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 King County's new interim sheriff
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3248756/patti-cole-tindall-king-county-interim-sheriff/
GIST	<p>King County Executive Dow Constantine announced his choice for the county's new interim sheriff on Tuesday, appointing Undersheriff Patti Cole-Tindall to fill the position starting on Jan. 1, 2022.</p> <p>Cole-Tindall will become the first person of color to ever serve as King County sheriff, having previously joined the department in 2015 as the chief of technical services. She was appointed to serve as undersheriff in 2020. According to the county, that role had her overseeing “the development and implementation of the KCSO strategic plan and the examination and strengthening of the KCSO complaint and use of force review processes.”</p> <p>“Patti’s background and experience in the sheriff’s office and across county government — working with labor, serving her community, and demonstrating integrity and transparency — make her uniquely qualified to step into this interim role,” Constantine said on Tuesday. “She embodies the key qualities we’re looking for as we begin to rethink community safety, hire the next generation of officers and search for a newly appointed sheriff.”</p> <p>Speaking on Tuesday following Constantine’s announcement, Cole-Tindall expressed her goal to “ensure a smooth transition.”</p> <p>“I am honored to serve as the interim sheriff, and will be working closely with my management teams to support and lead the people of the KCSO until the new sheriff is appointed,” she said.</p> <p>Previously, King County’s sheriff was an elected position decided by voters. A trio of charter amendments approved during 2020’s election changed that, giving the county executive the authority to appoint the role.</p> <p>At the time, incumbent Sheriff Mitzi Johanknecht had claimed the amendments would functionally “dismantle” her office, although others — including County Councilmember Girmay Zahilay — argued that they were crucial to creating a culture of accountability.</p> <p>Johanknecht’s term expires at the end of 2021. Cole-Tindall will serve as sheriff while the county conducts a nationwide search for a full-time replacement.</p> <p>The open position was posted in early November, and “will be shared nationally through various organizations and recruiting forums.” The county has also tagged leadership firm POLIHIRE to head up the recruitment process, which is expected to wrap up by the summer of 2022.</p> <p>Once a candidate is chosen by Constantine, they will be subject to a confirmation vote from the county council.</p>
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HEADLINE	1123 Buffalo NY area brings back mask mandate
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/23/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates?type=styl-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#buffalo-covid-mask-mandate
GIST	<p>With daily coronavirus case rates reaching record numbers and area hospitals more than 90 percent full, local officials in the Buffalo area reinstituted a mask mandate for all indoor public spaces that went into effect on Tuesday.</p> <p>“We really need to keep the hospitals from being inundated,” Mark Poloncarz, the Erie County executive, said on Monday in a news conference announcing the new policy. “These numbers are not good.”</p> <p>The mask mandate applies to all staff and patrons at stores, restaurants, bars, salons, and other public indoor spaces in the county, regardless of their vaccination status. It is the first phase of what Mr. Poloncarz warned would be increasing restrictions if virus numbers do not begin to stabilize.</p> <p>Erie County, which encompasses the city of Buffalo, is the first New York county to impose a blanket mask mandate for public indoor spaces since May, when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that vaccinated people could safely take off their masks in most settings.</p> <p>Federal officials eventually reversed that recommendation as the Delta variant spiked, but New York did not reinstitute a statewide mask mandate. Currently, most of the state, including New York City, only requires masks in specific locations such as in schools, on public transportation, and in medical settings.</p> <p>Western New York, a bustling five-county region of some 1.4 million people along the Canadian border and the Great Lakes, has seen cases spike dramatically in recent weeks. In Erie County, cases have doubled in the last month. Hospitalizations are up 50 percent in the last two weeks.</p> <p>Vaccination rates have not been high enough to head off the surge, even though about 75 percent of adults in Erie County have received at least one dose. County officials said that local case numbers now are actually higher than they were at this time last year. Rates among children and staff in schools are also at the highest levels since the start of the pandemic, Mr. Poloncarz said.</p> <p>“Until we can get through this, masking is necessary,” he said.</p> <p>Erie County decided to institute a mask mandate instead of requiring people to show proof of vaccination for entering most indoor public places, after hearing concerns from local business leaders that requiring masks would be less harmful to trade.</p> <p>But if the mask rule fails to curb virus rates, the county will require vaccination for indoor dining and entertainment, as New York City has. If that fails to work, it will bring back capacity restrictions in restaurants and other indoor public settings. And if that also fails, shutdowns will occur, Mr. Poloncarz said.</p> <p>Local officials said they were most closely watching the load in hospitals, which are already strained because of staff shortages. The wait time at emergency rooms for people who are not critically ill has risen to eight hours or more, officials said. And seasonal flu has yet to hit hard in New York State, according to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>“Our hospitals are in dire straits,” the Erie County health commissioner, Dr. Gale Burstein, said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 US, 5 world powers to tap oil reserves
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/23/business/biden-oil-reserves-gas-prices.html
GIST	The United States and five other world powers announced a coordinated effort to tap into their national oil stockpiles on Tuesday, attempting to drive down rising gas prices that have angered consumers around the world.

The move appeared to underwhelm oil traders, who had been expecting President Biden to announce a larger release from America's Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which is the biggest in the world with 620 million barrels. The price of a barrel of crude oil actually rose after the announcement in global trading, although administration officials said prices could fall in coming weeks.

The market reaction underscored the difficulties Mr. Biden faces, both politically and economically, in his efforts to react to the fastest increase in U.S. inflation in three decades. The president has seen his approval ratings slump as gas and food prices have risen, while Republicans have launched a steady series of attacks blaming Democrats.

Mr. Biden has shifted his messaging on the issue in recent weeks, in hopes of showing consumers he understands their financial pain. On Tuesday at the White House, he cast the release of oil from the strategic reserve as an important step toward lowering fuel costs for drivers at the start of the holiday travel season.

"Today we're launching a major effort to moderate the price of oil, an effort that will span the globe and ultimately reach your corner gas station, God willing," Mr. Biden said.

"While our combined actions will not solve the problem with high gas prices overnight, they will make a difference," he said. "It will take time, but before long you should see the price of gas drop where you fill up your tank."

Earlier on Tuesday, administration officials said Mr. Biden had ordered the Energy Department to tap into 50 million barrels of crude in the [Strategic Petroleum Reserve](#). Traders had been expecting 100 million barrels, said Richard Bronze, head of geopolitics at Energy Aspects, a market research firm in London.

Britain said it would authorize the release of up to 1.5 million barrels and India said it would release five million. Mr. Bronze estimated that Japan and South Korea would each add four million to five million barrels. China did not announce details of its plans.

The concerted effort, the largest ever for a release of strategic reserves across multiple countries, is meant to address fluctuations in supply and demand for oil, administration officials said. And it was a shot across the bow of [OPEC Plus](#), the name for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries as well as Russia and other countries. Mr. Biden has pushed those countries to increase production, but has been rebuffed.

The move could bring a response next week when the group holds its monthly meeting. While it could prompt those countries to increase production, it could just as easily push the cartel to restrict supply further and push global prices higher.

In recent monthly meetings, OPEC Plus has stuck with plans to increase production by a relatively modest 400,000 barrels a day each month. U.S. officials sidestepped a question about possible retaliation from OPEC Plus. The officials said they had pushed oil producers to announce their own supply increases for weeks and made clear to those nations that Mr. Biden and other world leaders were considering emergency releases of their own. They said Mr. Biden would have preferred a parallel release that included more oil-producing countries.

The price of oil has fallen since late October partly in anticipation that countries would take action to try to tame energy costs. The U.S. benchmark, West Texas Intermediate, immediately jumped after the administration's announcement, and was trading 1.3 percent higher for the day. So far this month, the price had dropped 4.75 percent.

Demand for oil fell precipitously in the early months of the pandemic, so oil-producing nations cut output. In the United States, reduced demand led to a substantial decline in drilling; the country's number of active oil rigs was down nearly 70 percent in summer 2020.

As prices rose in recent months, Mr. Biden looked for ways to show he was trying to tame prices, including [asking the Federal Trade Commission](#) to investigate possible illegal conduct by large oil companies in the national gasoline market. The president has pushed oil producers to ramp up supply [even as he urges the U.S. and other countries](#) to wean themselves from fossil fuels over the long term to avert catastrophic global warming.

On Tuesday, Mr. Biden said his environmental agenda was not contributing to the recent price increases at the pump.

“My effort to fight climate change is not raising the price of gas,” he said.

The emergency stockpile that Mr. Biden tapped is stored in underground caverns in Texas and Louisiana. It was established after the 1973-74 oil embargo by Arab members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, and has been tapped in emergencies like the buildup to the Persian Gulf war in 1991 and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when much of the Gulf of Mexico oil infrastructure was damaged. The reserve is also used to exchange or lend oil to refineries when accidents or storms block shipping channels.

Most experts believe a release could eventually lower prices modestly, but only for a short time because oil prices are set globally and world consumption averages roughly 100 million barrels a day. [The average price for a gallon of regular gasoline](#) in the United States rose to \$3.40 on Tuesday from \$2.11 a year ago, according to AAA, the travel services organization. But gas prices have started to level off in the past week.

Several recent presidents have ordered releases from America’s strategic reserves, including Mr. Bush; his father, George H.W. Bush; Bill Clinton; and Barack Obama.

But research suggests the effect on gas prices, for the most part, is modest at best — underscoring how gas prices are largely outside a president’s control.

Mr. Obama’s administration led the most recent coordinated global release of oil reserves in June 2011, when the [United States and 27](#) other nations released 60 million barrels of reserves to replace lost production from Libya that was halted by political turmoil in the North African country. Of the total amount of oil released, about half came from reserves in the United States, with the rest from the other 27 industrialized nations that belonged to the International Energy Agency.

Biden administration officials said the coordinated effort announced on Tuesday would come in two parts: a loan of 32 million barrels over several months to refineries and the accelerated sale of 18 million barrels, which has already been congressionally authorized.

Britain will be allowing companies to voluntarily release their oil reserves. If every company takes advantage of the option, it would amount to 1.5 million barrels, a British government representative said.

Helima Croft, head of global commodities at RBC Capital Markets, an investment bank, said OPEC Plus could choose to respond at its next meeting, on Dec. 2.

“If OPEC wants to be obstructionist, they can blunt the impact” of the oil release, she said, by not approving the next monthly 400,000 barrels-a-day production increase at the meeting.

On the other hand, she added, doing that would “expose them to a lot of problems in Washington,” potentially including an antitrust bill in Congress aimed at OPEC, known as NOPEC, that could call for going after the financial reserves of countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. “I think it would be a nuclear option and OPEC won’t want to go down that path,” she said.

	<p>Robert McNally, president of Rapidan Energy Group, a market research firm and a former energy adviser in George W. Bush's White House, said Tuesday's announcement "may be politically smart, but I don't think it is smart in terms of policy and will likely backfire."</p> <p>"There are good odds that OPEC Plus will offset this, and they have a bigger fire hose than we do," he said. "Using strategic stocks to defend an oil price level set in a global market is pure folly."</p> <p>Republicans including Representative Kevin McCarthy of California, the House minority leader, criticized Mr. Biden and blamed the White House for inflation.</p> <p>In a tweet, Mr. McCarthy said the decision to tap America's strategic reserves "is a crass political ploy just 3 days ahead of Thanksgiving."</p> <p>Democrats in Congress, including the Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, have recently called for Mr. Biden to take action to provide immediate relief for Americans.</p> <p>Jennifer M. Granholm, the secretary of energy, cautioned Tuesday against expecting an immediate, dramatic drop in gas prices. When asked when Americans might see lower prices, Ms. Granholm made no promises: "It won't be tomorrow," she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Study: surge in illegal migration for US jobs
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/23/major-study-undercuts-biden-explanation-surge-illegal-migration/
GIST	<p>Migrants from Central America are rushing to the U.S. illegally not because of violence or natural disasters in their home countries but because of jobs, a major new study found, challenging claims that they are asylum-seekers fleeing persecution.</p> <p>The study also calculated that migrants from the emigration hubs of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala pay smugglers \$1.7 billion a year to be shepherded into the U.S. illegally.</p> <p>And a staggering 43% of Central Americans have a desire to leave their home countries, up from just 8% a couple of years ago. But only about 3% were making concrete plans.</p> <p>Still, nearly 30% of households in the three key countries reported getting money sent back home from a household member working in another country, according to the report, a joint effort by the Migration Policy Institute, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the World Food Programme.</p> <p>The analysts conducted a 5,000 in-person survey in the spring and ran an online survey with more than 6,000 responses, building a broad picture of the factors pushing people to leave. They concluded that while violence and insecurity are "longstanding triggers" for migration, most people cited economic reasons for wanting to leave.</p> <p>"Low wages, unemployment and insufficient income to cover basic necessities directly affected people's livelihoods and contributed significantly to the desire to emigrate," the analysts said.</p> <p>The report challenges the vision of the Biden administration, which argues violence and insecurity are pushing folks to leave their homes and head north and characterizes many of the migrants as asylum-seekers.</p> <p>Vice President Kamala Harris, tapped by President Biden to get to the bottom of the "root causes" of migration, released a report in July blaming a variety of things such as the coronavirus pandemic and climate change for this year's migrant surge, on top of the usual factors of violence, food insecurity and poverty.</p>

Ms. Harris' strategy called for more international investment to try to boost local economies, as well as efforts to combat corruption, promote human rights and try to reduce violence.

"The COVID-19 pandemic and extreme weather conditions have indeed exacerbated the root causes of migration — which include corruption, violence, trafficking and poverty," Ms. Harris wrote in her report.

Her office didn't respond to a request for comment on the report.

As written, U.S. law requires asylum-seekers to be fleeing government persecution. General levels of violence or rough economic conditions are not supposed to be sufficient.

But the U.S. system is generous in allowing claims to be filed, with asylum-seekers usually released from custody and issued work permits while they await decisions in their cases. That chance to gain a foothold — and a job — in the U.S. serves as an incentive for many to make the journey.

That's particularly true for Central Americans, and particularly those from the Northern Triangle who have played an increasingly prominent role in the story of illegal immigration to the U.S. over the last decade. Where Mexicans once dominated, in four of the last five years, the Northern Triangle countries combined to send more people.

In fiscal 2021, which ended Sept. 30, Customs and Border Protection reported 655,594 encounters along the southern border with Mexicans, compared to 701,049 encounters with people from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Given higher recidivism rates for Mexicans, the ratio of individual Central Americans is even higher than those numbers suggest.

While Tuesday's report looks at what is pushing people to leave their homes, those reasons are inextricably linked to factors in the U.S. that draw them here. Research by other experts found Central Americans raise their incomes about 10-fold by coming to the U.S., versus doubling incomes if they move to Mexico.

The new report found about 90% of recent migrants from the Northern Triangle countries headed to the U.S. Spain ranked as the second top destination, at 4%, and Mexico was third at 2%.

Central Americans pay dearly for the trip.

Those who come illegally shell out an average of \$7,500 per person, the analysts said. Those who come legally pay about \$4,500. Coming as part of a mass caravan was the cheapest at \$2,900, the report said.

Those making the trip often report going deeply into debt, either to family members or smuggling organizations, to finance their journey, then spend their first months or years in the U.S. trying to work it off.

Annual average incomes in the Northern Triangle countries range from about \$2,500 to \$4,500.

Ironically, if wages in those countries were to rise, it could spur even more people to make the trip north. Tuesday's report found that lack of money was the most frequently cited impediment would-be migrants cited for why they haven't attempted the journey.

At the same time, the home countries — and families of migrants — have become dependent on the money being sent back.

The average Guatemalan household in which someone had migrated was receiving \$350 a month in remittances. For Hondurans, it amounted to \$170, and Salvadoran homes saw \$150. Those remittances accounted for nearly a quarter of El Salvador's total gross domestic product in 2020.

	<p>About a quarter of Northern Triangle households reported that someone in their home attempted to migrate over the past five years. Nearly a quarter of those have been deported back home, and another 9% came back voluntarily.</p> <p>When asked the motivations for leaving, economics dominated, with 75% of Salvadorans, 89% of Hondurans and 91% of Guatemalans citing that as a factor.</p> <p>Climate and the environment — a major explanation Ms. Harris has cited — was a reason for 3% of migrants.</p> <p>Insecurity or violence were factors for 8%, which was the same rate as those seeking to reunite with family members already in their destination countries. But the three countries were not all the same. Salvadorans were far more likely to cite violence or family reasons for making the trip.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Antifa members urge: get a gun
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/23/antifa-urges-members-take-arms-after-kyle-rittenho/
GIST	<p>Some members of Antifa are responding to the acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse last week by getting guns themselves.</p> <p>According to social-media posts collected by conservative journalist Andy Ngo, the violent leftist group sees as a threat to them Mr. Rittenhouse's successful claim of self-defense in the shootings of three rioters in Kenosha, Wisconsin, last year.</p> <p>"Antifa accounts in Portland & beyond are terrified over the Rittenhouse acquittal because they're afraid others will shoot them dead during an attack & have a legal argument for self-defense. They're urging comrades to get guns immediately so they can kill before being killed," Mr. Ngo wrote on Twitter, providing multiple screenshots to support his claim.</p> <p>The account Antifada161 noted that "every leftist and antifascist who doesn't have guns...should consider getting one/some as fast as possible" just hours after the acquittal.</p> <p>Another screen-shotted activist replied by saying he was worried about carrying a gun without knowing how to use it, but solicited for "an antifascist group to learn with in SW Washington."</p> <p>The shadowy group is purposely secretive and its masked activists basically never use their real names or have verifiable identities on social media.</p> <p>But numerous group members, following the framing of the Rittenhouse case on MSNBC and other left-leaning news outlets, said last week's verdict gives conservatives a right to kill them.</p> <p>"Can't stress enough about how much the Rittenhouse acquittal has altered the protest landscape. What little safety we thought we might have had doesn't actually exist and it's just open season on us for all of the Kyle Rittenhouses," wrote Twitter poster "VioletNightmare."</p> <p>Activist "Chud Watch" agreed and said the fears were widespread.</p> <p>"We talk about this all the time with our close circles ... the day the boy walked, the game changed," he wrote.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Experts: US vulnerable to China EMP attack
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/23/clock-ticking-us-vulnerable-chinese-electromagnet/

America's electric grid and other key infrastructure remain vulnerable to an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack from China, North Korea or other adversary, and the U.S. is at a pivotal moment if it wants to avoid a potential doomsday scenario, a panel of experts warned Tuesday.

At a major virtual forum hosted by the Universal Peace Federation, specialists warned of the growing threat of an EMP attack that could knock out communications, water and sewer services, transportation systems, retail and other central components of American society.

The dangers of EMP attacks have long been understood, but China's shocking test of a new hypersonic glide vehicle last summer has some analysts fearing it could give the nation's Communist leaders the perfect avenue to deploy a high-altitude EMP, offering the chance to defeat the U.S. by sparking a long-lasting blackout, shutting down food and water delivery systems, and crushing military communications and contact with far-flung posts.

China already possesses so-called "super EMPs," or weapons designed to create bursts of energy much stronger than past versions, according to an analysis by the Task Force on National and Homeland Security, a congressional advisory board.

Combining EMP attacks with other modern unconventional military tactics could be even more devastating.

"That poses a real threat of possibly being able to win a war with a single blow by means of an EMP attack. Moreover ... they don't envision employing an EMP by itself. It would be used in conjunction with cyberattacks and physical sabotage, and non-nuclear EMP," Peter Vincent Pry, the task force's executive director, said at Tuesday's event, which was moderated by Washington Times Foundation President Michael Jenkins.

"This is regarded by Russia, China, North Korea and Iran as potentially the most decisive military revolution in history," Mr. Pry said. "By attacking the technological Achilles heel of a nation like the United States, you could bring us to our knees and not even have to do battle with the Marines or the Navy or the Air Force, and win a war in 24 hours with a single blow — a combined EMP cyberattack."

Indeed, American scholars and lawmakers have warned for decades that U.S. infrastructure — especially the electric grid system — is highly vulnerable to EMPs. Huge swaths of infrastructure aren't adequately protected against such an attack, specialists warned, despite widespread agreement on the importance of the problem and the existence of technology to solve it.

President Trump in 2019 signed an executive order directing a new level of government-wide coordination on combating a potential EMP attack. Recent federal spending bills also have included measures to ramp up EMP defenses.

But many specific steps have yet to be implemented, such as bringing all pieces of the electric grid up to the military's "hardening" standard so they are able to withstand a major electromagnetic pulse.

"We do know how to protect against it. It's not a technological problem. It's a political problem," Mr. Pry said, citing federal bureaucracy and other factors that make the issue especially complex and difficult.

Indeed, other specialists said that the Biden administration should keep the nation's EMP vulnerability firmly in mind as it doles out billions of dollars in infrastructure money.

"There are active protection measures that will ground the pulse as it strikes the electric system of a vehicle, for example. The good news is those technologies are out there, they exist," said David Winks, managing director at AcquSight, a leading cyber, physical and electromagnetic resilience firm. "I think it would be a good use of some of this infrastructure money to start investing in this."

One of the largest hurdles is the vast number of state agencies and utility companies involved with the nation's electric grid, making it difficult to install a single set of hardening standards across the entire country.

'The clock is ticking'

Meanwhile, China has invested heavily in its offensive EMP programs, and those investments are bearing fruit. Last August, for example, the South China Morning Post and other regional media outlets reported that China very likely conducted its first test of an EMP weapon, successfully using the pulse to knock drones out of the sky. The Post cited papers published by Chinese technology journals that reported the test but offered little detail.

The Pentagon warns that electronic warfare is an increasingly important piece of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) arsenal and its preparations for a potential clash with the U.S.

China's electronic warfare strategy "emphasizes suppressing, degrading, disrupting, or deceiving enemy electronic equipment throughout the continuum of a conflict while protecting its ability to use the cyber and electromagnetic spectrum," reads a recent Pentagon report on Chinese military capabilities. "The PLA is likely to use electronic warfare early in a conflict as a signaling mechanism to warn and deter adversary offensive action. Potential EW targets include adversary systems operating in radio, radar, microwave, infrared and optical frequency ranges, as well as adversary computer and information systems."

Even nations without China's cutting-edge military capabilities still could be able to inflict serious damage using EMP technology.

"There is no need for precision. North Korea doesn't need to have a very good ballistic missile in order to precisely deploy and detonate the weapon," said Plamen Doynov, a professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and chief technology officer at the company EMP Shield.

Mr. Doynov also warned that unlike a nuclear strike, traditional bombing campaign or ground invasion, an EMP attack doesn't directly cause any casualties, potentially allowing an enemy to more easily justify the move and make retaliation a more difficult political decision for the state that is targeted.

"It's bloodless, at least initially," he said.

But over time, hundreds of millions of lives could be lost. Mr. Pry has estimated that a yearlong blackout caused by an EMP could ultimately kill 90% of Americans.

Such a catastrophic situation at home, of course, would allow American adversaries to essentially do as they pleased around the globe.

"Imagine the president in the situation where the dispute is over Taiwan, or the dispute is with Russia over the Baltic states," Mr. Pry said at Tuesday's event. "And they do an EMP [attack] on the United States. What's the president going to do? Try to go into World War III, which he will surely lose? ... Or is he going to use the residual capabilities that we have, especially the military capabilities, to try to recover those critical civilian infrastructures because the clock is ticking toward the deaths of millions of Americans?"

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HEADLINE	11/24 China: US 'mistake' invite Taiwan to summit
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/24/china-accuses-us-of-mistake-after-biden-invites-taiwan-to-democracy-summit
GIST	China's government has accused Joe Biden of "a mistake" in inviting Taiwan to participate in a democracy summit alongside 109 other democratic governments.

Taiwan was included in a list of participants for next month's Summit for Democracy, published by the state department on Tuesday. Taiwan is a democracy and self-governing, but [Beijing claims it is a province of China](#) and has accused its government of separatism.

The inaugural gathering is considered a test of Biden's pledge that he would return the US to a position asserting global leadership to challenge authoritarian forces led by [China](#) and Russia. Neither is included in the virtual summit, scheduled for 9 and 10 December.

On Wednesday, Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, said the inclusion of Taiwan was a "mistake" and Beijing opposed "any official interaction between the US and China's Taiwan region".

"This stance is clear and consistent. We urge the US to stick to the 'one China' principle and the three joint communiques," she said.

The US's 'one China' policy acknowledges that Beijing claims Taiwan as a province but does not say it recognises the claim.

Since taking office, Biden and the White House have reiterated [long-standing US support](#) for its "one China" policy, which officially recognises Beijing rather than Taipei, but also said the US "strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait".

A spokesman for Taiwan's presidential office thanked Biden for the summit invitation, and said they would be "a force for good in international society".

"Taiwan will cooperate firmly with like-minded countries to protect universal values such as freedom, democracy and human rights; and also safeguard regional peace, stability and development," said the spokesman, Xavier Chang.

During [a virtual summit with Biden last week](#), China's leader, Xi Jinping, said Beijing would have "no alternative but to take drastic measures" if their "red lines" were crossed. In August China's state media tabloid the Global Times warned against inviting Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, to the summit, and said the US should use the Apec model, presumably in referring to Taiwan as "Chinese Taipei".

The editorial said failure to do so would be a "severe escalation" which would not be tolerated by Beijing.

Bonnie Glaser, director of the Asia Program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, said Chinese experts had been told Taiwan would be invited, and the main question was who would represent Taiwan.

"I'm really not sure if Beijing's bottom line is simply that Tsai not be allowed to participate," said Glaser. "But she won't be invited, so maybe they can tell their domestic audience that the US backed down in the face of Chinese pressure."

The event will bring together democracies such as France and Sweden but also countries such as the Philippines, India and Poland, where activists say democracy is under threat.

The announcement came shortly after the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance released a report saying the US also "fell victim to authoritarian tendencies itself, and was knocked down a significant number of steps on the democratic scale", Bloomberg [reported](#).

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HEADLINE	11/23 WHO: 2M Europe Covid deaths by Mar.
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/23/covid-deaths-in-europe-to-top-2-million-by-march-says-who

Total deaths across Europe from Covid-19 are likely to exceed 2 million by March next year, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) has said, adding that the pandemic had become the number one cause of death in the region.

Reported deaths have risen to nearly 4,200 a day, double the number being recorded in September, the agency said, while cumulative reported deaths in the region, which includes the UK, have already surpassed 1.5 million.

Describing the situation as “very serious”, the WHO said it expected “high or extreme stress” on hospital beds in 25 of the region’s 53 countries, with intensive care units in 49 countries set to come under similar strain.

On current trends, the region’s cumulative death toll would surpass 2.2 million by 1 March, it said.

As Europe again becomes the centre of the pandemic, with tighter controls mainly on the unvaccinated and [heated debate](#) in several countries about making vaccination obligatory, [Austria](#) this week became the first west European country to re-enter lockdown since inoculation began earlier this year.

The increase in cases was being driven by the highly transmissible Delta variant which is now dominant across the region, the WHO said, fuelled by a widespread relaxation of preventive measures, such as mask wearing and physical distancing, since the summer.

With more and more people gathering indoors in the colder late-autumn weather, a large number still not vaccinated, and vaccine efficacy against severe forms of the disease waning, “many people are left vulnerable to the virus”.

Dr Hans Kluge, the WHO’s regional director for [Europe](#), said it was essential that countries adopted a “vaccine plus” approach. “This means getting the standard doses of vaccine and taking a booster if offered,” he said, “but also incorporating preventive measures into our normal routines.”

In combination with the vaccines, Kluge said, wearing a mask, washing your hands, ventilating indoor spaces, keeping physical distance, and sneezing into your elbow were “simple, effective ways of gaining control over the virus”.

He added: “All of us have the opportunity and responsibility to help avert unnecessary tragedy and loss of life and limit further disruption to society and businesses over this winter season,” by avoiding “the last resort of lockdowns and school closures”.

The WHO said more than 1bn vaccine doses had been administered in the WHO European region and 53.5% of people had completed their inoculation programme, but added that the figure “hides wide differences between countries”, with some populations less than 10% vaccinated and others more than 80%.

The vaccines were “are a vital tool to prevent severe disease and death” and had saved hundreds of thousands of lives, it said, calling for governments to do more to increase coverage, including by working with behavioural and cultural scientists to understand individual and community reluctance.

But with evidence growing that the vaccines’ protection against infection and mild disease declined over time, it urged that booster doses “should be given to protect the most vulnerable, including the immunocompromised, as a priority”, as well as to the over-60s and healthcare workers as a precaution.

Data showed only 48% of people across the region wear a mask when they leave home, it said, estimating that 95% mask usage could prevent more than 160,000 deaths that could otherwise occur before 1 March.

	“Today, the Covid-19 situation across Europe and central Asia is very serious,” Kluge said. “We face a challenging winter ahead, but ... all of us – governments, health authorities, individuals – can take decisive action to stabilise the pandemic.”
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HEADLINE	11/23 Supply woes ease in Europe but costs up
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/supply-woes-start-to-ease-in-europe-but-businesses-costs-surge-11637670072?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>European businesses are seeing some easing in the delays they face getting hold of parts and raw materials, but supply-chain blockages pushed their costs higher, driving them to raise prices at record pace and fueling inflationary pressures.</p> <p>Factories around the world have faced shortages since the end of last year, when a surge in demand for goods such as laptops and bicycles took many by surprise at a time when shipping and other parts of the logistics network were in disarray.</p> <p>Those shortages have worsened over recent months as a result of fresh lockdowns in key Asian manufacturing centers in response to a resurgence in Covid-19 infections.</p> <p>But over recent weeks, there have been signs of a modest easing of bottlenecks as Asian factories reopen.</p> <p>A monthly survey of European businesses by data firm IHS Markit that is closely watched by policy makers found that there was some easing of delays during November, but not enough to rein in rising costs and remove the threat of a further rise in consumer prices.</p> <p>“We are seeing the first signs of increasing availability for some raw materials, but it is still too early to speak of a trend reversal here,” said a spokeswoman for German chemical giant BASF SE. “It is currently not foreseeable to what extent this development will stabilize and what influence this will have on prices.”</p> <p>IHS Markit’s measure of the time taken for parts ordered by factories to be delivered to them rose to 21.5 in November from 19.4 in October. A reading below 50.0 indicates that delivery times are getting longer, so the November reading indicates that delays are building at a slower pace.</p> <p>Despite those persistent shortages, European manufacturers reported a pickup in output during November, contributing to an acceleration in economic growth as activity in the services sector also strengthened. That was a surprise for most economists, who had expected supply problems and a recent pickup in Covid-19 infections to drag on the economy.</p> <p>But while signs that the economic recovery continues will be welcome news for policy makers at the European Central Bank, they will worry about rising costs, with businesses reporting that they in turn raised their prices at the fastest pace on record.</p> <p>“Upward pressure on prices has meanwhile intensified far above anything previously witnessed by the surveys,” said Chris Williamson, IHS Markit’s chief business economist.</p> <p>There are some signs that global supply-chain woes are beginning to recede. In Asia, Covid-related factory closures, energy shortages and port-capacity limits have eased in recent weeks. Ocean freight rates have retreated from record levels.</p> <p>In recent weeks, bottlenecks at British ports have loosened from the conditions that had made them among the most congested in Europe.</p> <p>“Uncomfortable stability is the phrase of the moment,” said Tim Morris, chief executive of UK Major Ports Group, a trade body.</p>

	<p>But for many European businesses, freight charges remain much higher and waiting times much longer than they were before the pandemic hit, and are likely to remain so for many months to come.</p> <p>“There are so many choke points...not enough containers, not enough ships, train problems in Germany,” said Marie Müller-Blech, who works at Inge’s Christmas Decor GmbH, a family run company in central Germany.</p> <p>Since late last year, the most acute shortages have been felt in businesses that use semiconductors. The switch to home working and a heightened emphasis on home leisure activities saw a surge in demand for electronic devices that overwhelmed the semiconductor industry.</p> <p>There are signs that demand for electronic devices is cooling. According to HSBC, a U.K.-based bank that has long financed Asian trade, global growth in new orders for electronics slowed in October from the previous month.</p> <p>Some automobile manufacturers, who have had to idle factories because of the semiconductor shortage, are looking forward to a busier 2022.</p> <p>“By the end of the year, Volkswagen expects an overall slight improvement in semiconductor supply,” said a spokesman for the German auto giant. “However, the semiconductor supply situation remains very volatile. We expect bottlenecks in production beyond 2021.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 British Columbia flood lifts lumber prices
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/british-columbia-flood-lifts-lumber-prices-11637668802?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>First came fire; now floods.</p> <p>Wood producers in British Columbia have been cut off from forests and customers by natural disaster for the second time this year, sending lumber prices higher.</p> <p>Deluges washed out roads and bridges, caused land slides and cut off rail lines in the Canadian province, where more rainfall is in the forecast. In July, forest fires snarled supply lines and prompted mills to curtail output in the important wood-products region.</p> <p>Front-month lumber futures have risen 44% over the past week, ending Monday at \$772.60 per thousand board feet. They had reached \$831.80 Monday, their highest level since summer, after the pandemic lumber bubble burst and prices were plunging from a historic peak.</p> <p>On-the-spot prices for the spruce, pine and fir boards that come from British Columbia’s forests rose about 12% last week in response to the deluge, according to wood-pricing firm Random Lengths. Buyers sought replacements in eastern markets, where prices also climbed.</p> <p>The spring surge, which sent futures as high as \$1,711.20, threatened the red-hot housing market and was a sign of the supply-chain chaos to come as the economy reopened.</p> <p>Prices plunged when remodelers and do-it-yourselfers delayed projects that were suddenly too expensive. Problems in British Columbia, however, have kept prices from falling to anywhere near the \$357 that lumber futures averaged in the five years before the pandemic.</p> <p>Analysts don’t expect the floods to have a long-term impact on the North American lumber supply because there are routes through Alberta to the U.S. They say gains in the futures market have probably been sharper than warranted. Yet, destructive rains are the just latest obstacle to British Columbia’s struggling forest-products sector, which has contended not just with fire and flood, but also infestations of</p>

	<p>wood-boring beetles, export duties into the U.S. that are set to double at month's end and forests that are increasingly off limits to logging.</p> <p>"The real-world supply impact may be a fair bit lower than futures prices are suggesting," said Hamir Patel, an analyst with Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. "Canadian mills were aggressively moving product across the border earlier this month ahead of duties doubling."</p> <p>That should mean that there is enough wood south of the border to sustain home builders until supply routes reopen, Mr. Patel said.</p> <p>"The market is clearly skittish after the unprecedented volatility," BMO Capital Markets forest-product analysts wrote in a note to clients. "Low inventories, pending import duty changes and recent reports of better-than-expected demand at big-box retailers are all exacerbating the pricing moves."</p> <p>Canadian lumber producers for years have been shifting production to the Southern U.S., where there is an abundance of cheap timber. Companies such as West Fraser Timber Co. and Interfor Corp. have been using their pandemic windfalls to acquire more sawmills in the Southern pine belt while trimming back their businesses at home in British Columbia.</p> <p>Earlier this month, the provincial government said that it would defer harvests on about 10,000 square miles of timberland to protect old-growth forests and biodiversity. Analysts say the move could result in more Canadian mill closures and necessitate additional lumber-making capacity in the South to keep the market balanced and prices in check.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Seattle 221 homeless deaths since 2020
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/221-homeless-people-have-died-in-seattle-since-last-winter-one-of-the-highest-numbers-on-record/
GIST	<p>Outside St. James Cathedral, rain came down in gouts, spilling down the front steps and inside the vaulted sanctuary. Inside, the only warmth came from 221 candles arranged around the font, and the warm organ notes that filled the room, as around a hundred voices sang "O Holy City, seen of John":</p> <p>"O shame to us who rest content, while lust and greed for gain, in street and shop and tenement, wring gold from human pain," the mourners sang.</p> <p>Two hundred and twenty-one candles, one for each homeless person who died on the streets of Seattle over the previous year.</p> <p>The congregation at St. James has gathered each year for more than a decade — no one can remember when it started, but it's continued each year, not even interrupted by pandemic restrictions. They mark the names of those who've died without a home in Seattle and King County. It's one of just a few such Catholic services in a country where homeless deaths are rarely counted and even more rarely remembered.</p> <p>At the end of the service, laypeople from the congregation read the names of all 221 dead from last November to this one, and the six massive bells at the top of the cathedral's 167-foot towers rang for each name. That's more bells, and more candles, and more deaths, than the cathedral has ever marked.</p> <p>Ten months into the calendar year, the coronavirus pandemic, drug epidemic, record-breaking heat wave, and customary cold and wet snaps had killed at least 159 homeless people, which is higher than normal. The county medical examiner's office, who investigate violent and sudden deaths, doesn't expect 2021 homeless deaths to pass the previous high of 194 in 2018, but they're likely to pass the two years since.</p> <p>While the medical examiner's is the most official count of homeless deaths in the county, Lee Thornhill, a public health data and evaluation manager for the public-private Healthcare for the Homeless Network,</p>

cautioned that many homeless people who die in places like hospitals are likely missed by this count, and extrapolating too much from a sample size of less than 200 can lead to faulty conclusions.

“One death outside is one too many,” Thornhill said, but “it’s hard from an analytical, statistical perspective to look at small numbers and make meaning from them.”

Still, there are smaller numbers within that total that tell their own stories: The number of dead outside or in vehicles or garages so far this year, 103, is already creeping dangerously close to 2018’s total of 107. It hints at the shelter beds the highly contagious coronavirus took from the system by making it impossible to shelter people in large rooms together. With shelters like the Union Gospel Mission cutting their capacity, people who might otherwise be in shelter were forced to find other places to sleep.

COVID-19 has claimed more homeless lives this year than it did last year — 28 so far as opposed to 18 last year — as public health and homeless providers have struggled to achieve a sufficient vaccination rate to slow the disease in shelters and housing programs.

Since late July, the county has seen a prolonged spike of between 22 and 68 cases a week in shelters, homeless camps and housing facilities, its most persistent spread since the pandemic began.

Seventy-one deaths so far this year are from overdose, a number that Brad Finegood, a strategic adviser for the public health department, said is higher in the homeless population than ever before. Most of those involve multiple drugs in the form of opioids, especially fentanyl, and stimulants like methamphetamine.

There are a few causes for this rise, Finegood said. Pandemic restrictions shrank treatment programs for substance use disorder, especially for homeless people, at the same time negatively affecting many people’s mental health. Finegood said doctors are hearing people have less access to heroin and more access to cheap fentanyl.

“We need to be able to keep doors open and keep good quality services around for people,” Finegood said.

Dr. Nancy Connolly, who lost her favorite patient to overdose earlier this year, said it’s horrible to watch her clients try to pull themselves off the street, only to find an uncaring system full of barriers to their recovery.

“It’s terrible to me — unconscionable, as they say — that people are discharged from mental health hospitals to the street, from jails to the street,” Connolly said.

More than the numbers, each name the congregants read out at the requiem Mass also told its own story.

Betty Kautz, 66, who died of hypothermia and whose body was found by police next to a dumpster behind an AMPM last winter; she had no shoes on and she had one arm out of her shirt — possibly because she was in the middle of taking it off when she died, according to the police report.

Mohamed Hersi, a mid-30s man who was killed by a blunt force head injury in City Hall Park, according to the medical examiner.

Laten Arnold Jenkins Jr., who could often be seen walking outside the Nordstrom downtown with a blanket wrapped like a cloak around his tall frame, was found dead in that blanket the day after Thanksgiving last year, according to his brother, Lawrence. Lawrence wrote in the South Seattle Emerald that Laten — who had schizophrenia — was loved and missed by many more than the “many hundreds” of people who passed by his body at a downtown bus stop the day he died.

Others don’t have names: Unidentified Male. Unidentified Female.

Some were infants when they died: Baby Boy Rea-Garcia.

	<p>“We ourselves are not without blame when it comes to what happened to them,” said Father Michael Ryan in his address to the congregation, an address that doesn’t change greatly each year. “May they rest in peace, and may we not rest peacefully until we have made the scandal of homelessness our nation’s priority.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Minnesota struggles; Guard called to assist
SOURCE	https://gizmodo.com/minnesota-calls-up-national-guard-as-covid-19-overwhelm-1848108187
GIST	<p>The governor of Minnesota, Tim Walz, has called up the National Guard to assist long term care facilities, as the state struggles with a huge surge in covid-19 hospitalizations that has overwhelmed the health care system.</p> <p>Roughly 400 members of the National Guard have been training over the past week as certified nursing assistants and temporary nursing aides and will be deployed primarily to nursing homes in an effort to shore up staff. The members of the National Guard are expected to help out for at least three weeks, according to Fox 9.</p> <p>Minnesota hospitals are currently taking care of 1,414 patients with covid-19 and 340 in the ICU, according to the latest numbers from the Minnesota Department of Health. Only 2% of the state’s ICU beds are available, with 56 Minnesota hospitals reporting they have absolutely no capacity to take ICU patients.</p> <p>Minnesota reported 4,714 new covid-19 cases on Monday and 37 new deaths, significant figures for a state of only 5.6 million people. Just 62% of the state’s population is fully vaccinated, above the national average of 59.2%, but still low compared to the vaccination rates of other wealthy countries.</p> <p>Nationwide, the U.S. reported 158,867 new covid-19 cases on Monday and 1,235 new deaths, with the head of the CDC warning on Monday that case counts are going to climb in the dead of winter.</p> <p>“Heading into the winter months, when respiratory viruses are more likely to spread, and with plans for increased holiday season travel and gatherings, boosting people’s overall protection against covid-19 disease and death was important to do now,” CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said.</p> <p>Walensky noted that covid-19 patients who require hospitalization are still overwhelmingly the unvaccinated, with those who haven’t gotten the shot 14 times more likely to die from the disease.</p> <p>Minnesota has one of the highest covid-19 rates in the country right now relative to population size, leading many in the state to wonder what they’re doing wrong. Sadly, the answer is simple. There aren’t enough people getting vaccinated, largely for political reasons. Roughly 9% of Democrats say they don’t plan to get vaccinated against covid-19, while a whopping 38% of Republicans say they don’t want to be vaccinated, according to the latest figures from the Kaiser Family Foundation.</p> <p>“Our force is highly adaptive and with training will assist Minnesota’s healthcare community in responding to healthcare staffing shortages,” Army Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke, the Minnesota National Guard’s Adjutant General, said in a statement published online.</p> <p>“One of the Minnesota National Guard’s pillars is people as they are our most valuable resource,” Manke continued.</p> <p>“We acknowledge that we share this resource with employers, and we know these activations can disrupt their businesses and organizations. We appreciate the employers of our citizen-Soldiers and Airmen, as we could not conduct our federal, state, and community missions without their support.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 India arrests prominent Kashmiri activist
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/23/world/asia/kashmiri-activist-india-antiterror.html
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI — A prominent Kashmiri human rights activist, Khurram Parvez, was arrested by Indian security forces on Monday and charged under a strict antiterrorism law, his family said, amid growing concerns that the Indian authorities are abusing the law to quash dissent.</p> <p>The arrest was widely condemned, including by rights groups and a rapporteur for the United Nations, who have called for Mr. Parvez’s release.</p> <p>Mr. Parvez’s brother, Sheikh Shariyar, said the authorities carried out a four-hour search of their home on Monday and took Mr. Parvez away for what they said would be routine questioning. But the family was later told that Mr. Parvez had been arrested and would be transferred to New Delhi.</p> <p>A copy of the arrest memo showed that Mr. Parvez was being charged under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, an antiterrorism law with roots in the British colonial era that makes being freed on bail extremely difficult.</p> <p>“They took Khurram’s mobile and laptop,” Mr. Shariyar said. “At six in the evening they called me and told me that they had arrested him.”</p> <p>Mr. Parvez is a leading member of the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, a group that has frequently published reports on human rights abuses in the region, including disappearances, torture and mass graves. Kashmir, disputed between India and Pakistan, remains one of the world’s most heavily militarized areas, with hundreds of thousands of troops on the Indian side of the valley alone.</p> <p>In 2016, Mr. Parvez was prevented from boarding a flight to Geneva to attend the Human Rights Council and arrested days later. He was released after 76 days; a judge called the arrest illegal and arbitrary.</p> <p>The work of the Jammu Kashmir Coalition was recognized by the Norway-based Rafto Foundation for Human Rights in 2017 for documenting “human rights violations in Kashmir under very difficult circumstances.”</p> <p>The foundation, in a statement, said its members had worked closely with Mr. Parvez’s organization and knew well that its work was “directed towards raising awareness about human rights violations by peaceful and democratic means.”</p> <p>They described the accusations made in the arrest memo as “wholly implausible” and said that the episode was an “aggressive invasion into and constriction of the space of human rights defenders and their organizations” that “unfortunately fits a pattern of behavior by the Indian government.”</p> <p>Jostein Hole Kobbeltvedt, the director of the Rafto Foundation, also criticized the government, saying: “We observe with regret that the Indian government intimidates citizens working to secure the values and norms enshrined both in the constitution of India and in international treaties ratified by the government itself.”</p> <p>Mary Lawlor, the U.N. special rapporteur on human rights defenders, said she was disturbed by the reports of the arrest.</p> <p>“He’s not a terrorist, he is a Human Rights Defender,” she wrote on Twitter. Amnesty International also weighed in.</p> <p>India’s Supreme Court is reviewing a petition on concerns that the antiterrorism law, known as U.A.P.A., is widely abused by the administration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to suppress dissent.</p> <p>A group of former government officers have filed a petition arguing that the prosecution rates under the law remain abysmally low — about 2 percent, according to the government’s own admission in Parliament.</p>

Still, those charged under the law sometimes end up spending years in jail, some [even dying there](#), before their trial has begun or resulted in a conviction.

While India's judiciary has expressed concern about the abuse of [colonial-era laws](#) and the [heavy-handedness](#) of the security forces, leaders in Mr. Modi's administration have remained bullish in their messaging to the security forces.

In [a recent speech](#) at a ceremony for trainee police officers, Mr. Modi's national security adviser, Ajit Doval, described civil society as the "new frontier of war" — remarks that were widely criticized for blurring lines in the way the judiciary has expressed concern about.

"Wars have ceased to become an effective instrument for achieving their political or military objectives," Mr. Doval told the officers in training, adding: "But it is the civil society that can be subverted, that can be suborned, that can be divided, that can be manipulated, to hurt the interests of a nation. And you are there to see that they stand fully protected."

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HEADLINE	11/23 CDC revises Pennsylvania vax numbers
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/23/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates?type=styleIn-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#about-1-2-million-extra-vaccine-doses-were-reported-in-pennsylvania-according-to-the-cdc
GIST	<p>In the largest revision of state vaccination numbers to date, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated those for Pennsylvania, which had counted about 1.2 million more doses than had actually been administered.</p> <p>The C.D.C. said the data, updated almost every day on its website, had been corrected. As of Tuesday evening, about 81 percent of people in Pennsylvania had received at least one shot of a vaccine, according to C.D.C. data, whereas on Monday the data indicated that about 84 percent of people in the state had gotten a shot.</p> <p>The agency has been periodically revising vaccination numbers in states since July 14. Altogether, the C.D.C. and the states have reduced the number of reported doses in the U.S. by about 2 million.</p> <p>The C.D.C. has posted on its website that the revisions are part of a collaboration with states to gather their most "complete and accurate" data. Sometimes the revisions result in more shots being added to a state's tally. Other times they result in a drop. Illinois, for example, revised its data to add about 316,000 doses in late October only to subtract about 214,000 doses a few weeks later.</p> <p>Barry Ciccocioppo, communications director for Pennsylvania's Department of Health, said that the department "continues to update and refine our vaccination data throughout the commonwealth to ensure duplicate vaccination records are removed and dose classification is correct." He said that the C.D.C. had now begun to "rectify" the data.</p> <p>"This is not a practice specific to Pennsylvania and the C.D.C. is going through a similar process with other states across the country," he said.</p> <p>Cindy Prins, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Florida, said she feared that people might jump to the conclusion that there were deliberate errors in the initial reporting, but she did not believe that was the case. "I think it's just a process of cleaning up and making sure what is in there is accurate to the best of our ability to know that," Dr. Prins said.</p> <p>Still, without fully accurate and up-to-date vaccination rates, it is difficult for counties to make informed health recommendations, she said. If vaccination rates are overreported, that could give counties a false sense of confidence that more people are vaccinated than actually are.</p>

	More than 230 million people across the United States have received at least one shot of a coronavirus vaccine, according to the C.D.C. Last week, the agency authorized booster shots for all adults . Across the U.S., Covid-19 infections have been rising, with more than 90,000 cases reported on average each day.
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HEADLINE	11/23 More lives lost to Covid this year than last
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/23/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates?type=stylIn-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#united-states-death-toll-covid
GIST	<p>This was supposed to be the year vaccines brought the pandemic under control. Instead, more people in the United States have died from Covid-19 this year than died last year, before vaccines were available.</p> <p>As of Tuesday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had recorded 386,233 deaths involving Covid-19 in 2021, compared with 385,343 in 2020. The final number for this year will be higher, not only because there is more than a month left but because it takes time for local agencies to report deaths to the C.D.C.</p> <p>Covid-19 has also accounted for a higher percentage of U.S. deaths this year than it did last year: about 13 percent compared with 11 percent.</p> <p>Experts say the higher death toll is a result of a confluence of factors: most crucially lower-than-needed vaccination rates, but also the relaxation of everyday precautions, like masks and social distancing, and the rise of the highly contagious Delta variant.</p> <p>Essentially, public health experts said, many Americans are behaving as though Covid-19 is now a manageable, endemic disease rather than a crisis — a transition that will happen eventually but has not happened yet.</p> <p>Yet many are also refusing to get vaccinated in the numbers required to make that transition to what scientists call “endemicity,” which would mean the virus would still circulate at a lower level with periodic increases and decreases, but not spike in the devastating cycles that have characterized the pandemic. Just 59 percent of Americans are fully vaccinated, the lowest rate of any Group of 7 nation.</p> <p>“We have the very unfortunate situation of not a high level of vaccine coverage and basically, in most places, a return to normal behaviors that put people at greater risk of coming in contact with the virus,” said Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist and senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. “If you take no protections whatsoever, you have a virus that is capable of moving faster and you have dangerous gaps in immunity, that adds up to, unfortunately, a lot of continued serious illness and deaths.”</p> <p>Dr. Celine Gounder, an infectious disease specialist at Bellevue Hospital Center, estimated that roughly 15 percent of the U.S. population might have immunity from prior infection, which is not as strong or durable as immunity from vaccines.</p> <p>Many of those people have also been vaccinated, but even assuming the two groups didn’t overlap and so 74 percent of Americans had some level of immunity, that still would not be enough to end the pandemic, said Dr. Gounder. It would probably take an 85 to 90 percent vaccination rate to make the coronavirus endemic, she said.</p> <p>“When vaccines rolled out, people in their minds said, ‘Covid is over,’” Dr. Gounder said. “And so even if not enough people are vaccinated, their behavior returned — at least for some people — to more normal, and with that changing behavior you have an increase in transmission.”</p> <p>Some news outlets reported last week that confirmed 2021 deaths had surpassed 2020 deaths. Those reports stemmed from counts of deaths based on when the deaths were reported, not when they happened — meaning some deaths from late 2020 were counted in early 2021. The C.D.C. counts, which did not</p>

	show that mark being reached until this week, are more accurate because they are based on the dates on death certificates.
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HEADLINE	11/24 Russian public being primed for war?
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/will-putin-invade-ukraine-russians-are-being-told-to-get-used-to-the-idea?ref=home
GIST	<p>Domestic propagandists and state TV pundits are promoting the idea of an inevitable confrontation with the West as Russia's military posture grows increasingly hostile, causing major concern for its nearest neighbors and NATO. Ukraine remains the crown jewel for the Kremlin and the Russian public is being primed for the intended absorption of more territories under the umbrella of the Russian Federation, while NATO is being accused of fomenting the potential escalation.</p> <p>“World War III is knocking at our door,” warned one top propagandist.</p> <p>Whether or not the Kremlin is planning to speed up its creeping assault against Ukraine's Donbas region in the near future is a mystery even to the most knowledgeable experts with close access to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Nonetheless, they eagerly fulfill the Russian leader's express intent to keep NATO—and the West in general—in a state of hypervigilance.</p> <p>Ukraine's non-affiliation with NATO remains at the top of the Kremlin's long wish list, with Putin demanding “serious long-term guarantees that ensure Russia's security” in the region. The real issue is not that NATO presents an acute threat to the Kremlin, but rather that its involvement stands in the way of Russia swallowing additional Ukrainian territories. Putin's objectives with respect to subverting Ukraine remain the same, with two different paths to getting there: by securing Ukraine's submission and undermining its sovereignty through unwarranted concessions from the West, or by escalating Russia's military aggression.</p> <p>State TV propagandist Dmitry Kiselyov—notorious for boasting that “Russia is the only country in the world that is realistically capable of turning the United States into radioactive ash”—explained that Moscow's moves are explicitly designed to affect the U.S. and NATO. On his Sunday show, <i>Vesti Nedeli</i>, Kiselyov said that Russia's tests of its Tsirkon hypersonic cruise missile and its recent anti-satellite test were “arguments” to reinforce Russia's “red lines” with respect to Ukraine.</p> <p>Kiselyov boasted: “By stepping over the “red line,” NATO risks losing all 32 GPS satellites at once, which will blind all their missiles, planes and ships, not to mention the ground forces. Americans are paying attention to this—they can't afford not to.”</p> <p>State TV experts equivocate between two conflicting messages: on one hand, claiming that Russia is not <i>planning</i> to invade Ukraine, but then immediately pointing out that “the Ukrainian problem” could be solved “very quickly,” due to Russia's superior military might. They argue that the U.S.-led NATO needs to be taught a lesson and brag that “underpaid and underfed American soldiers” are no match for the Russians. Blustery proclamations are promptly followed up by the claim that none of the participants are interested in a hot war.</p> <p>Igor Korotchenko, a member of the Russian Defense Ministry's Public Council and editor-in-chief of <i>the National Defense</i> magazine, said the military movements that concerned Western and Ukrainian officials served as an intentional signal, designed to elicit a reaction. In a message addressed to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on the state TV show <i>60 Minutes</i> this Monday, Korotchenko said about Russia's military buildup: “If your satellites are seeing this, that means it is being shown to you. Any American military analyst at the Pentagon can tell you that. You don't know—and won't know—Russia's real plans and goals. Your HUMINT [intelligence gathered by means of interpersonal contact] is either blocked, neutralized, or is feeding you disinformation, in course of the operations conducted by Russian intelligence services. You need to relax and aim towards constructive interaction.”</p>

Calling out the U.S. for being concerned with Russia's activities, the rabidly anti-American host of *60 Minutes*, Olga Skabeeva, insisted: "Mind your own business." However, Russian state media does not abide by the same principles, with obsessive interest in American elections and internal affairs, dwelling on everything from QAnon and turkey prices to the sentencing of Jacob Chansley and the acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse. America is at the forefront of the Kremlin's attention, so resorting to provocation in order to be acknowledged as an equal and to extract concessions would almost make sense.

During a speech to Russian diplomats last week, Putin [complained](#): " We understand that our partners are very peculiar and, to put it mildly, do not take all our warnings and talks on red lines seriously." He added: "Our recent warnings have had a certain effect, tensions have risen... It is important for them to remain in this state for as long as possible."

Russian state TV pundits and propagandists took Putin's message to heart and snapped into action. Appearing on *60 Minutes* the day after Putin's speech, Igor Korotchenko [warned](#): "Let's be straightforward about it: World War III is knocking at our door. It will come from the direction of Poland and Ukraine." Korotchenko argued that Russia can fight back against alleged Western provocations by demonstrating its military might: "We need to grab the West by the udders, they should feel our hand and we should feel their fearful pulse... The best defense is an offense... Our military fist should be at the face of every Western politician."

On state TV show *Sunday Evening with Vladimir Soloviev*, lawmaker Oleg Morozov [asserted](#): "The level of relations is so catastrophically low... that the possibility of a local hot conflict in the Ukrainian region is higher than ever. If this conflict takes place, it will break the entire construct of world relations. It will redraw the geographical map of Europe and change its political lines. The result will be what was promised by our president: the end of Ukrainian statehood... It will lead to total sanctions against Russia and the breakdown of all negotiations."

Adding fuel to the fire, host Vladimir Soloviev asked: "Then why should we stop at Ukraine? Why not solve all of our problems at once?" Soloviev argued that since it's unlikely that the major world powers would resort to nuclear war, Russia can move forward with achieving its objectives undeterred: "If we have to end up behind the Iron Curtain, why not collect some more lands and peoples first?"

The head of the State Duma Committee on Defense, Andrei Kartapolov, suggested on the same show that the Ukrainian problem could be solved militarily in a matter of hours. He said: "If they intend to turn us into a pariah, there is no reason to stop at Ukraine... If they want to make us tremble, we should make them tremble." Morozov chimed in with a sly grin: "Which is what Putin said. Keep them on the edge of their seat."

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HEADLINE	11/23 Dutch Covid infections new weekly record
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/dutch-covid-infections-hit-weekly-record-hospitals-stressed-81351119
GIST	<p>THE HAGUE, Netherlands -- Dutch coronavirus infection numbers hit a new weekly record Tuesday, climbing 39% while hospital and intensive care unit admissions also rose sharply, prompting the government to make social distancing mandatory again for all adults.</p> <p>The latest report by the country's public health institute on a surge in COVID-19 cases came a day after the Dutch government introduced legislation that would clear the way to restrict access for unvaccinated people to indoor venues such as bars, restaurants and museums if infections keep rising.</p> <p>The legislation would limit the country's COVID-19 pass system to people who are fully vaccinated or have recovered from a coronavirus infection. People could no longer get the health pass with negative tests. The bill is expected to be debated by lawmakers next week.</p>

	<p>The policy “protects unvaccinated people against infection, illness and hospital admission in high-risk locations,” the government said.</p> <p>But the government did not wait that long to bring back mandatory social distancing, which takes effect Wednesday for everybody 18 and over. The government already strongly advised people to stay 1.5 meters (5 feet) from one another; making it mandatory means businesses will have to enforce the measure and law enforcement can issue fines if people do not comply.</p> <p>According to the new government figures, hospital admissions rose 19% over the last week while admissions to intensive care units climbed 26%. The health institute said 265 people died of COVID-19 last week, raising the confirmed pandemic death toll in the Netherlands above 19,000.</p> <p>Children under 12 had the highest proportion of positive tests in the week up to Tuesday. The European Union’s drug regulator is expected to issue a decision later this week on a request by Pfizer and BioNTech to approve their COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 5 to 11.</p> <p>A panel of experts that advises the Dutch government urged people this week to improve basic virus-fighting measures such as social distancing and mask wearing, saying that many people are not adhering to a partial lockdown introduced more than a week ago.</p> <p>A protest Friday against the COVID-19 pass system in Rotterdam degenerated into violence that led to police officers opening fire on rioters.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Vaccines making this Thanksgiving easier
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/vaccines-making-thanksgiving-easier-hot-spots-remain-81355687
GIST	<p>The U.S. is facing its second Thanksgiving of the pandemic in better shape than the first time around, thanks to the vaccine, though some regions are seeing surges of COVID-19 cases that could get worse as families travel the country for gatherings that were impossible a year ago.</p> <p>Nearly 200 million Americans are fully vaccinated. That leaves tens of millions who have yet to get a shot in the arm, some of them out of defiance. Hospitals in the cold Upper Midwest, especially Michigan and Minnesota, are filled with COVID-19 patients who are mostly unvaccinated.</p> <p>Michigan hospitals reported about 3,800 coronavirus patients at the start of the week, with 20% in intensive care units, numbers that approach the bleakest days of the pandemic's 2020 start. The state had a seven-day new-case rate of 572 per 100,000 people Tuesday, the highest in the nation, followed by New Hampshire at 522.</p> <p>In the West, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah and Montana also ranked high. Some Colorado communities, including Denver, are turning to indoor mask orders to reduce risk, a policy that has also been adopted in the Buffalo, New York, area and Santa Cruz County, California.</p> <p>The statistics in Michigan are "horrible," said Dr. Matthew Trunsky, a respiratory specialist at Beaumont Health in suburban Detroit.</p> <p>“We got cold and moved indoors and have huge pockets of unvaccinated people,” he said. “You can't have pockets of unvaccinated people who don’t want to be masked and not expect to get outbreaks, not expect to lose parents, not expect to lose teachers.”</p> <p>During a recent office visit, he encouraged a patient who uses oxygen to get vaccinated. The patient declined and now is in the hospital with COVID-19, desperately relying on even more oxygen, Trunsky said.</p>

He said he continues to encounter patients and their family members espousing conspiracy theories about the vaccine.

“We’ve had several people in their 40s die in the last month — 100% unvaccinated,” Trunsky said. “It’s just so incredibly sad to see a woman die with teenagers. Especially with that age group, it’s nearly 100% preventable.”

In Detroit, where less than 40% of eligible residents were fully vaccinated, Mayor Mike Duggan said hospitalizations have doubled since early November.

“We have far too many people in this country that we have lost because they believed some nonsense on the internet and decided not to get the vaccine,” said Duggan, a former hospital executive.

Despite hot spots, the outlook in the U.S. overall is significantly better than it was at Thanksgiving 2020.

Without the vaccine, which became available in mid-December 2020, the U.S. a year ago was averaging 169,000 cases and 1,645 deaths per day, and about 81,000 people were in the hospital with COVID-19. The U.S. now is averaging 95,000 cases, 1,115 deaths and 40,000 in the hospital.

Airports have been jammed. More than 2.2 million people passed through security checkpoints on Friday, the busiest day since the pandemic shut down travel early in 2020. On some recent days, the number was twice as high as Thanksgiving a year ago.

Sarene Brown and three children, all vaccinated, were flying to Atlanta from Newark, New Jersey, to see family. People close to them have died from COVID-19.

“I’m thankful that I’m here, and I’m not in heaven, and I’m thankful for my family and that God helped me survive,” said Neive Brown, 7, who got her first dose.

More than 500,000 Americans have died of COVID-19 since the last Thanksgiving, for an overall death toll of over 770,000.

“We would encourage people who gather to do so safely after they’ve been fully vaccinated, as we’ve been saying for months now,” said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “I do think that this is very different because we actually have the tools to prevent the vast majority of cases.”

Dr. Eric Topol, head of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, said his optimism is tempered by the delta variant’s ability to jump from person to person, especially among the millions who are unvaccinated or are due for a booster.

“That equals very high vulnerability,” Topol said.

Denver’s public hospital, Denver Health, is sending people elsewhere because of a lack of beds. Staff members were exhausted from treating COVID-19 patients and others who had postponed other medical needs, chief executive Robin Wittenstein said.

“Our system is on the brink of collapse,” she said.

Arizona reported at least 2,551 COVID-19 patients in hospitals, far below the peak of last winter but still reason for concern. Officials said beds were limited.

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HEADLINE	11/23 SKorea pandemic high: 4,000 cases in a day
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/south-korea-sets-pandemic-high-4000-virus-cases-81365256

GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea -- New coronavirus infections in South Korea exceeded 4,000 in a day for the first time since the start of the pandemic as a delta-driven spread continues to rattle the country after it eased social distancing in recent weeks to improve its economy.</p> <p>The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency said most of the new 4,116 cases reported Wednesday came from the capital Seoul and its surrounding metropolitan region, where an increase in hospitalizations has created fears about possible shortages in intensive care units.</p> <p>The country's death toll is now 3,363 after 35 virus patients died in the past 24 hours. The 586 patients who are in serious or critical conditions also marked a new high.</p> <p>South Korea is the latest country to see infections and hospitalizations rise after loosening social distancing measures amid high vaccination rates. Cases are also climbing in the United States ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, while Austria entered a major lockdown on Monday as a virus wave spreads across Europe.</p> <p>Officials in South Korea eased social distancing rules starting this month and fully reopened schools on Monday in what they describe as first steps toward restoring some pre-pandemic normalcy. In allowing larger social gatherings and longer indoor dining hours at restaurants, officials had hoped that improving vaccination rates would keep hospitalizations and deaths down even if the virus continues to spread.</p> <p>But health workers are now wrestling with a rise in serious cases and fatalities among older people who rejected vaccines or whose immunities have waned after getting injected early in the vaccine rollout that began in February.</p> <p>"The rise in serious cases has been considerably higher than what we had expected," Health Ministry official Son Youngraee said in a briefing. Son said officials are closely monitoring the situation and may announce steps to re-impose stronger social distancing measures in coming weeks if the spread continues to worsen.</p> <p>According to KDCA data, most of the virus patients who died in recent weeks were in their 60s or older, and the majority of them were not fully vaccinated or vaccinated at all. Son said there has also been a rise in breakthrough infections among older people who received two shots, showing how the delta variant is reducing the effectiveness of vaccines.</p> <p>Officials are now scrambling to speed up the administration of booster shots and create plans to share hospital capacities between the greater Seoul area and other regions with smaller outbreaks to prevent hospital systems from being overwhelmed.</p> <p>Son said the government has issued administrative orders to hospitals in the capital region to designate hundreds of more beds for virus patients. He said more than 83% of the region's ICUs designated for COVID-19 treatment are currently occupied.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Germany faces grim Covid milestone
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/germany-faces-grim-covid-milestone-leadership-flux-81367102
GIST	<p>ESCHWEILER, Germany -- Germany is set to mark 100,000 deaths from COVID-19 this week, passing a somber milestone that several of its neighbors crossed months ago but which Western Europe's most populous nation had hoped to avoid.</p> <p>Teutonic discipline, a robust health care system and the rollout of multiple vaccines — one of them homegrown — were meant to stave off a winter surge of the kind that hit Germany last year.</p>

Yet complacency and a national election, followed by a drawn-out government transition, saw senior politicians dangle the prospect of further lifting restrictions even as Germany's infection rate rose steadily this fall.

"Nobody had the guts to take the lead and announce unpopular measures," said Uwe Janssens, who heads the intensive care department at the St. Antonius hospital in Eschweiler, west of Cologne.

"This lack of leadership is the reason we are here now," he said.

Doctors like Janssens are bracing for an influx of coronavirus patients as confirmed cases hit fresh daily highs that experts say is also being fueled by vaccine skeptics.

Resistance to getting the shot — including the one developed by German company Biontech together with its U.S. partner Pfizer — remains strong among a sizeable minority of the country. Vaccination rates have stalled at 68% of the population, far short of the 75% or higher that the government had aimed for.

"We've increasingly got younger people in intensive care," said Janssens. "The amount of time they're treated is significantly longer and it blocks intensive care beds for a longer period."

Older people who got vaccinated early in 2021 are also seeing their immunity wear off, making them vulnerable to serious illness again, he said. Echoing problems seen during the initial vaccine rollout, authorities have struggled to meet demand for boosters even as they tried to encourage holdouts to get their first shot.

Some German politicians are suggesting it's time to consider a vaccine mandate, either for specific professions or for the population as a whole. Austria took that step last week, announcing COVID-19 shots will become compulsory for all starting in February after seeing a similar reluctance to get vaccinated fuel fresh outbreaks and hospitalizations.

Germany's outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel said in June that she didn't favor such a measure. Signaling a possible shift in position, Merkel summoned leaders from the three parties negotiating to form the next government for talks Tuesday at the chancellery to discuss the pandemic situation.

Merkel's likely successor, current Finance Minister Olaf Scholz of the center-left Social Democrats, has refused to be drawn on whether he would back compulsory COVID-19 shots.

Together with the environmentalist Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats, his party recently passed a law that replaces the existing legal foundations for pandemic restrictions with narrower measures, starting Wednesday. These include a requirement for workers to provide their employers with proof of vaccination, recovery or a negative test. But the change also makes it harder for Germany's 16 governors to impose hard lockdowns without getting approval from state assemblies.

Getting those majorities may be hardest in those states where case numbers are highest. A recent study found infection rates are higher in areas where support is biggest for the far-right Alternative for Germany, a party that has campaigned against pandemic restrictions.

Last week Saxony, an eastern state with the highest infection rates and where the Alternative for Germany is particularly strong, announced that crematoria would be allowed to operate on Sundays to cope with the higher-than-usual number of deaths.

Meanwhile, German authorities have activated an emergency system to coordinate the distribution of seriously ill patients across the country. Earlier this month, two patients were taken from southern Germany to Italy for treatment, a significant change from last year, when Italian patients were being sent to German hospitals.

	<p>Germany boasted almost four times as many intensive care beds per capita as Italy had then, a factor that experts say was key to the low German death toll at the time.</p> <p>Since January, Germany has had to cut its ICU capacity by 4,000 beds due to lack of staff, many of whom have quit because of the pressure they endured earlier in the pandemic.</p> <p>“It’s hard for people to cope with this, physically and psychologically,” Janssens said of the situation doctors and nurses face in the coming months.</p> <p>“We’ll survive, somehow,” he added.</p> <p>The World Health Organization’s European office warned this week that availability of hospital beds will again decide how well the region copes with the expected rise in cases over the coming months — along with vaccination rates.</p> <p>Based on current trends, Europe could see another 700,000 deaths reported across the 53-nation region by next spring, with 49 countries expected to see “high or extreme stress in intensive care units,” the agency said Tuesday.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Mexico breaks up 2nd migrant march
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/mexico-breaks-migrant-march-81365522
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- Mexican authorities say a group of hundreds of mainly Haitian and Central American migrants who had started walking north have agreed to be separated and taken by bus to several cities to apply for humanitarian visas.</p> <p>The migrant march had set out on Nov. 18 with about 2,000 migrants from the southern city of Tapachula.</p> <p>Migrants have grown tired of the long delay in granting visas in Tapachula, near the Guatemala border, where many say they can’t find work.</p> <p>Mexico’s National Immigration Institute said the migrants had agreed to stop their march Tuesday in the southern city of Mapastepec, near Tapachula. The institute distributed video showing many of them boarding buses to other cities in central and western Mexico.</p> <p>An earlier migrant march that set out in October is now in southern Veracruz state, but it has dwindled to several hundreds migrants, down from a high point of some 4,000.</p> <p>Mexican authorities had said the attempts to walk through southern Mexico put the health and safety of the migrants — many accompanied by children — at risk.</p> <p>The Mexican government had relied on a strategy of containing migrants in the southernmost part of the country to alleviate pressure at the U.S. border.</p> <p>But those states are the poorest and there is far more opportunity to find work in Mexico’s northern and western states.</p> <p>Activists claim that even migrants who have received humanitarian visas that are supposed to allow them to travel in Mexico have been detained by immigration agents and sent back to Tapachula.</p> <p>Migrant caravans began several years ago as a way for migrants who did not have the money to pay smugglers to take advantage of safety in numbers as they moved toward the U.S. border. However, more recently Guatemala and Mexico have become more aggressive in quickly breaking up the caravans with security forces.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	11/23 Ransomware attackers working on holidays
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/security-warning-ransomware-attackers-are-working-on-the-holidays-even-if-you-arent/
GIST	<p>Ahead of Thanksgiving this Thursday, the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA) and the FBI have released a warning for critical infrastructure providers to stay vigilant on holidays and weekends, because hackers don't plan on taking a holiday break.</p> <p>The agency issued a similar warning in August ahead of the Labor Day weekend, warning that ransomware attackers often choose to launch attacks on holidays and weekends, specifically when businesses are likely to be closed.</p> <p>"Recent history tells us that this could be a time when these persistent cyber actors halfway across the world are looking for ways—big and small—to disrupt the critical networks and systems belonging to organizations, businesses, and critical infrastructure," CISA and the FBI said.</p> <p>The agencies said they had not identified any specific threats. However, they noted that some of the worst ransomware attacks happened on holidays and weekends, including Independence Day and the Mother's Day weekend.</p> <p>To prepare for potential attacks on the Thanksgiving weekend, the agencies have outlined several key steps organizations can take to minimize the risk of an attack.</p> <p>These include: identifying key IT security staff who could handle a surge in work after a ransomware attack; implementing multi-factor authentication for remote access and administrative accounts; enforcing strong passwords and avoiding password reuse; ensuring RDP is secure and monitored; and reminding employees not to click on suspicious links.</p> <p>Organizations also need to review incident response measures and procedures.</p> <p>"To reduce the risk of severe business/functional degradation should your organization fall victim to a ransomware attack—review and, if needed, update your incident response and communication plans. These plans should list actions to take—and contacts to reach out to—should your organization be impacted by a ransomware incident."</p> <p>CISA and the FBI urge users and organizations to take these actions "immediately" to protect themselves against this potential threat.</p> <p>The agencies detailed several major ransomware attacks that aligned with US public holidays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In May 2021, leading into Mother's Day weekend, a ransomware gang deployed DarkSide ransomware against Colonial Pipeline. After DarkSide actors gained access to the victim's network, they deployed ransomware to encrypt victim data and—as a secondary form of extortion—exfiltrated the data before threatening to publish it to further pressure victims into paying the ransom demand.• In May 2021, over the Memorial Day weekend, meatpacker JBS was struck by a Sodinokibi/REvil ransomware attack that affected U.S. and Australian meat production facilities, resulting in a complete production stoppage.• In July 2021, during the Fourth of July holiday weekend, Sodinokibi/REvil ransomware actors attacked Kaseya's remote monitoring and management tool. <p>While most of these attacks have been attributed to suspected Russian-based hackers, Microsoft last week warned that state-sponsored hackers from Iran are increasingly using ransomware to disrupt their targets.</p>

	The US, UK and Australia called out Iranian attackers for exploiting known flaws in Fortinet's VPN and Microsoft Exchange to deploy ransomware .
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HEADLINE	11/23 'Shiba Inu' token scams surge
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/shiba-inu-token-scams-cryptocurrency-youtube-telegram/
GIST	<p>When the Shiba Inu token, a meme-based virtual currency, hit its highest all-time value in October, it didn't take long for scammers to seize on the trend for their own benefit.</p> <p>Live YouTube videos promising bogus giveaways of the token have racked up hundreds of thousands of views, while groups on Telegram promoting other frauds have also exploded, according to research shared exclusively with CyberScoop.</p> <p>Many Shiba scams identified by the security firm Tenable all take a nearly identical approach. Accounts live-stream old footage from a June event featuring Jack Dorsey and Elon Musk, a popular name among crypto enthusiasts, with on-screen instructions for users to send an arbitrary amount of currency into a wallet, with the promise of getting twice as much or more in return.</p> <p>Scams have earned \$239,000 worth of cryptocurrency since October 20, based on an analysis of online wallet addresses associated with nefarious Shiba Inu-themed pages, according to Satnam Narang, a researcher at Tenable. Such ruses are known as "giveaway scams" and are among the most common forms of cryptocurrency fraud, according to the Federal Trade Commission.</p> <p>While Shiba might be the latest virtual currency to attract cybercriminals preying on investors, it's only the latest evolution in a growing problem. All told, the FTC in May reported a record of more than \$80 million in reported consumer losses from cryptocurrency fraud. Because cryptocurrency exchanges lack the same federal protections as traditional financial exchanges, victims' losses are not protected by the federal government.</p> <p>"It's like the Wild West with cryptocurrencies," said Narang, who has previously researched on crypto-related fraud efforts. "Whatever is the new token that is becoming popular, scammers won't be far behind."</p> <p>Shiba Inu, which actually encompasses three different virtual currency tokens, was launched in 2020 by an anonymous group as a competitor to Dogecoin. While the currency started out as what investors call a "meme coin" — meaning it has no real-world use — it has gained credibility in recent months through listings on major exchanges, including Binance. AMC theaters this month announced it would be the first company to accept the token as payment.</p> <p>According to Shiba Inu token's official Reddit page, users have been reporting scams at least as far back as May. And fake giveaways aren't the only way that thieves are using the coin to trick would-be investors.</p> <p>In one campaign identified by Tenable, fraudsters directed users to a phishing link posing as the cryptocurrency wallet Trust. It's unclear if the link successfully tricked any victims into sharing their wallet information.</p> <p>While Shiba's value has dipped in recent days, fraud efforts are still prevalent.</p> <p>In addition to the research provided by Tenable, CyberScoop was also able to quickly surface six similar giveaway videos on YouTube using a sample search for the term "Shiba" between Monday, Nov. 22 and Tuesday, Nov. 23.</p> <p>The fake giveaways identified by CyberScoop racked up more than half a million views collectively. Multiple streams came from the same Thailand-based account "SHIBA INU." All of the live-streamed</p>

videos turned up within the first ten search results, often outranking a warning video about the scam that has received just 1,400 views.

The schemes coincide with recent efforts aiming to mitigate fraud.

Google in October [touted strides](#) in decreasing phishing emails used to takeover influencer accounts on YouTube to spread cryptocurrency scams. The spike in Shiba scams shows that even without hijacking influencers, cybercriminals have no problem reaching potential victims on YouTube.

YouTube did not respond to a request for comment.

Scams related to the token have intensified to the point that Shiba developers issued a video on Twitter Sunday urging buyers to avoid giveaway videos, and to not share wallet addresses. The developers also posted a video warning of suspicious activity on Telegram, in which fraudsters impersonate accounts and create fake users.

Telegram has become a popular social media platform for cryptocurrency investors, and many virtual currencies including Shiba have an official presence on the platform. Fraudsters have preyed on potential investors on Telegram with giveaway scams as well as “airdrop” scams promising free coins if users share their wallets, which function similarly to bank accounts. Dozens of channels promoting Shiba have been banned for “unfair promotion efforts,” according to Telegram Analytics, though it’s unclear if the bans were related to specifically defrauding investors.

Telegram did not respond to a request for comment about fraud on the site.

Replies to the initial warning tweet were full of frustrated users flagging scams like the ones called out in the video.

Within the cryptocurrency community, the hope that investors hold for the price of cryptocurrencies going up is sometimes referred to as “hopium,” a portmanteau of “hope” and “opium.” It’s that “dopamine rush” that thieves are taking advantage of, says Narang.

“Scammers know that and take advantage of people’s hopes, desires, because, for many people, they invest, sometimes even their life savings into these cryptocurrencies,” said Narang. “And then when they actually send them to these scammers, they’re devastated.”

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HEADLINE	11/23 Crooks continue using Zelle in scams
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/identity-and-access/cybercriminals-continue-using-zelle-to-scam-victims
GIST	<p>Last week, popular peer-to-peer payment (P2P) service Zelle experienced a hit from cybercriminals, who drained funds from accounts.</p> <p>Zelle is partnered with dozens of banks and credit unions. The most recent attack was based off a phishing scam with a spoofed text message from the target’s bank warning about a suspicious Zelle transfer. The bad actors then sent out text messages about suspicious bank transfers as a pretext to get unsuspecting people to call back or respond by text.</p> <p>“Despite widespread publicity of the scams involving the Zelle money transfer service, hackers continue to use social engineering to break into accounts. While the results aren’t in the range of the millions of dollars that ransomware attackers are demanding, individual losses can easily be in the thousands, said Saryu Nayyar, CEO of Gurucal.</p>

“Hackers are calling Zelle users, posing as representatives of Zelle or the underlying bank, and tricking them out of providing the user name of their account. With the user name, they change the password in real time, giving them the data necessary to hack the account.”

Bill Lawrence, chief information security officer for SecurityGate, noted that, “This common example of social engineering implemented by savvy actors is a time-tested tactic. What I find interesting is when this approach is aimed at operational teams in traditionally 'air gapped' critical infrastructure environments.”

According to an interview with [cybersecurity expert Brian Krebs](#), Ken Otsuka, senior risk consultant at CUNA Mutual Group, an insurance company that provides financial services to credit unions, said a phone fraudster typically will say something like, “Before I get into the details, I need to verify that I’m speaking to the right person. What’s your username?”

“In the background, they’re using the username with the forgot password feature, and that’s going to generate one of these two-factor authentication passcodes,” Otsuka said. “Then the fraudster will say, ‘I’m going to send you the password and you’re going to read it back to me over the phone.’”

Per Krebs: An important aspect of this scam is that the fraudsters never even need to know or phish the victim’s password. By sharing their username and reading back the one-time code sent to them via email, the victim is allowing the fraudster to reset their online banking password. Otsuka said in far too many account takeover cases, the victim has never even heard of Zelle, nor did they realize they could move money that way.

“The thing is, many credit unions offer it by default as part of online banking,” Otsuka said to Krebs. “Members don’t have to request to use Zelle. It’s just there, and with a lot of members targeted in these scams, although they’d legitimately enrolled in online banking, they’d never used Zelle before.”

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HEADLINE	11/23 FBI: phishing targets high profile brands
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-warns-of-phishing-targeting-high-profile-brands-customers/
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) warned today of recently detected spear-phishing email campaigns targeting customers of "brand-name companies" in attacks known as brand phishing.</p> <p>This warning was issued as a public service announcement through the bureau's Internet Crime Complaint Center platform in coordination with DHS' Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).</p> <p>The targets are sent to phishing landing pages through various means, including spam emails, text messages, or web and mobile apps that may spoof the identity or the online address of a company's official site.</p> <p>Attackers embed login forms or malware into their phishing pages with the end goal of stealing their victims' user credentials, payment details, or various other types of personally identifiable information (PII).</p> <p>In addition to these ongoing phishing attacks, threat actors are also likely developing tools to bait potential targets into revealing info for bypassing account protections two-factor authentication (2FA) by intercepting emails and compromising accounts.</p> <p>"When cyber criminals gain access to a consumer's online and email accounts, cyber criminals may be able to intercept emails with 2FA codes that are used to make significant changes to online accounts, update passwords, verify user access, or change security rules and setup before the account owner is notified and aware," the federal law enforcement agency said.</p>

"The FBI has observed cyber criminals selling scamming software and offering these tools with the appearance of their own ongoing technical support.

"Cyber criminals are financially motivated to develop these scampage tools to enhance their scamming tactics and more effectively harvest the credentials of consumers to compromise and takeover account access."

According to [Check Point's Brand Phishing Report for Q2 2021](#), the top five brands by their appearance in brand phishing attempts are Microsoft (45% of all brand phishing attempts globally), DHL (26%), Amazon (11%), Bestbuy (4%), and Google (3%).

Brand phishing defense recommendations

The FBI encouraged private sector partners to stay vigilant and evaluate their internal security policies and provide their consumers with info regarding account security protocols.

If you fall victim to a brand phishing attack, you should reach out to your local law enforcement agency or FBI field office (contact info available at www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices) and report the incident to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.ic3.gov immediately.

Consumers are advised to follow these recommendations to defend against phishing attempts:

- Be suspicious of unsolicited contact via email or social media from any individual you do not know personally and/or containing messages enticing you to open a link or attached file.
- When receiving account alerts, rather than clicking a link within an email or text, opt to navigate to the website using the secure URL to review any logs, messages, or notices.
- Closely verify the spelling of web addresses, websites, and email addresses that look trustworthy but may be imitations of legitimate websites, to include the username and/or domain names/addresses (i.e., capital "I" vs small "L", etc.).
- Use strong unique passwords, and do not re-use the same password across multiple accounts.
- Do not store important documents or information in your email account (e.g., digital currency private keys, documents with your social security number, or photocopies of a driver's license).
- Enable 2FA and/or multi-factor authentication (MFA) options to help secure online accounts, such as a phone number, software-based authenticator programs/apps, USB security key, or a separate email account (with a unique password that does not link to other consumer accounts) to receive authentication codes for account logins, password resets, or updates to sensitive account information.
- When possible, do not use your primary email address for logins on Websites. Create a unique username not associated with your primary email address.

On Monday, the FBI and CISA also warned critical infrastructure partners and public/private sector orgs [not to let down their defenses against ransomware attacks](#) during the holiday season.

In October, it notified the US public that threat actors are [actively using fake and spoofed unemployment benefit websites](#) to harvest their sensitive financial and personal info.

The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) said in February that [the total number of identity theft reports doubled](#) last year compared to 2019, with a record of 1.4 million reports within a single year.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Malware exploits new Windows zero-day
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/malware-now-trying-to-exploit-new-windows-installer-zero-day/
GIST	Malware creators have already started testing a proof-of-concept exploit targeting a new Microsoft Windows Installer zero-day publicly disclosed by security researcher Abdelhamid Naceri over the weekend.

"Talos has already detected malware samples in the wild that are attempting to take advantage of this vulnerability," [said](#) Jaeson Schultz, Technical Leader for Cisco's Talos Security Intelligence & Research Group.

However, as Cisco Talos' Head of Outreach Nick Biasini told BleepingComputer, these exploitation attempts are part of low volume attacks likely focused on testing and tweaking exploits for full-blown campaigns.

"During our investigation, we looked at recent malware samples and were able to identify several that were already attempting to leverage the exploit," Biasini told BleepingComputer.

"Since the volume is low, this is likely people working with the proof of concept code or testing for future campaigns. This is just more evidence on how quickly adversaries work to weaponize a publicly available exploit."

Zero-day bypasses Windows Installer patch

The vulnerability in question is a local privilege elevation bug found as a bypass to a patch Microsoft released during November 2021's Patch Tuesday to address a flaw tracked as [CVE-2021-41379](#).

On Sunday, Naceri published a [working proof-of-concept exploit](#) for this new zero-day, saying it works on all supported versions of Windows.

If successfully exploited, this bypass [gives attackers SYSTEM privileges on up-to-date devices running the latest Windows releases](#), including Windows 10, Windows 11, and Windows Server 2022.

SYSTEM privileges are the highest user rights available to a Windows user and make it possible to perform any operating system command.

By exploiting this zero-day, attackers with limited access to compromised systems can easily elevate their privileges to help spread laterally within a victim's network.

BleepingComputer has tested Naceri's exploit and used it to successfully open a command prompt with SYSTEM permissions from an account with low-level 'Standard' privileges.

"The best workaround available at the time of writing this is to wait Microsoft to release a security patch, due to the complexity of this vulnerability," explained Naceri.

"Any attempt to patch the binary directly will break windows installer. So you better wait and see how Microsoft will screw the patch again."

"We are aware of the disclosure and will do what is necessary to keep our customers safe and protected. An attacker using the methods described must already have access and the ability to run code on a target victim's machine," a Microsoft spokesperson told BleepingComputer when asked for more details regarding this vulnerability.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Exposed services compromised in 24hrs
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/threat-actors-find-and-compromise-exposed-services-in-24-hours/
GIST	<p>Researchers set up 320 honeypots to see how quickly threat actors would target exposed cloud services and report that 80% of them were compromised in under 24 hours.</p> <p>Malicious actors are constantly scanning the Internet for exposed services that could be exploited to access internal networks or perform other malicious activity.</p>

To track what software and services are targeted by threat actors, researchers create publicly accessible honeypots. Honeypots are servers configured to appear as if they are running various software as lures to monitor threat actors' tactics.

A tempting lure

In a new study conducted by Palo Alto Networks' Unit 42, researchers set up 320 honeypots and found that 80% of the honeypots were compromised within the first 24 hours.

The deployed honeypots included ones with remote desktop protocol (RDP), secure shell protocol (SSH), server message block (SMB), and Postgres database services and were kept alive from July to August 2021.

These honeypots were deployed worldwide, with instances in North America, Asian Pacific, and Europe.

How attackers move

The time to first compromise is analogous to how much the service type is targeted.

For SSH honeypots which were the most targeted, the mean time for the first compromise was three hours, and the mean time between two consecutive attacks was about 2 hours.

Unit 42 also observed a notable case of a threat actor compromising 96% of the experiment's 80 Postgres honeypots in just 30 seconds.

This finding is very concerning as it could take days, if not longer, to deploy new security updates as they are released, while threat actors just need hours to exploit exposed services.

Finally, regarding whether the location makes any difference, the APAC region received the most attention from threat actors.

Do firewalls help?

The vast majority (85%) of attacker IPs were observed on a single day, which means that actors rarely (15%) reuse the same IP on subsequent attacks.

This constant IP change makes 'layer 3' firewall rules ineffective against the majority of threat actors. What could have better chances of mitigating the attacks is to block IPs by drawing data from network scanning projects which identify hundreds of thousands of malicious IPs daily.

However, Unit 42 tested this hypothesis on a sub-group of 48 honeypots and found that blocking over 700,000 IPs had no significant difference in the number of attacks between the sub-group and the control group.

To protect cloud services effectively, Unit 42 recommends that admins do the following:

- Create a guardrail to prevent privileged ports from being open.
- Create audit rules to monitor all the open ports and exposed services.
- Create automated response and remediation rules to fix misconfigurations automatically.
- Deploy next-generation firewalls (WFA or VM-Series) in front of the applications.

Finally, always install the latest security updates as they become available as threat actors rush to utilize exploits for new vulnerabilities as they are published.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Info-stealing Trojan infects Android devices
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/over-nine-million-android-devices-infected-by-info-stealing-trojan/

A large-scale malware campaign on Huawei's AppGallery has led to approximately 9,300,000 installs of Android trojans masquerading as over 190 different apps.

The trojan is detected by Dr.Web as 'Android.Cynos.7.origin' and is a modified version of the Cynos malware designed to collect sensitive user data.

The discovery and report come from researchers at Dr. Web AV, who notified Huawei and helped them remove the identified apps from their store.

However, those who installed the apps on their devices will still have to remove them from their Android devices manually.

Trojan disguised as game apps

The threat actors hid their malware in Android apps pretending to be simulators, platformers, arcades, RTS strategy, and shooting games for Russian-speaking, Chinese, or international (English) users.

As they all offered the advertised functionality, users were unlikely to remove them if they enjoyed the game.

The list of the Cynos malware apps is too extensive to share here, but some notable examples that stand out due to having a large number of installations are listed below:

- 快点躲起来 (Hurry up and hide) – 2,000,000
- Cat adventures – 427,000
- Drive school simulator – 142,000

Since it's impractical to compare your list of installed apps to the [full list of 190 malicious apps](#), the more straightforward solution would be to run an AV tool that can detect Cynos trojans and their variants.

Powerful malware

The functionality of this Cynos trojan variant can perform various malicious activities, including spying on SMS texts and downloading and installing other payloads.

"The Android.Cynos.7.origin is one of the modifications of the Cynos program module. This module can be integrated into Android apps to monetize them. This platform has been known since at least 2014," explained Doctor Web malware analysts in [their report](#).

"Some of its versions have quite aggressive functionality: they send premium SMS, intercept incoming SMS, download and launch extra modules, and download and install other apps."

"The main functionality of the version discovered by our malware analysts is collecting the information about users and their devices and displaying ads."

The aggressive nature of the trojan becomes apparent right from the installation phase when it asks for permission to perform activities that are not generally associated with a game, such as making phone calls or detecting users' locations.

If the user grants the permission requests, the malware can exfiltrate the following data to a remote server:

- User mobile phone number
- Device location based on GPS coordinates or the mobile network and Wi-Fi access point data
- Various mobile network parameters, such as the network code and mobile country code; also, GSM cell ID and international GSM location area code
- Various technical specs of the device
- Various parameters from the trojanized app's metadata

In addition to the above, Cynos trojans can potentially download and install extra modules or apps, send premium service SMS, and intercept incoming SMS.

	As such, these apps can lead to unexpected charges from subscribing to premium services, and they can also drop even stealthier spyware payloads.
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HEADLINE	11/23 New Android spyware variants
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/new-android-spyware-variants-linked-to-middle-eastern-apt
GIST	<p>New variants of Android spyware linked to a Middle Eastern advanced persistent threat (APT) group have been designed to be stealthier and more persistent, Sophos researchers reported today.</p> <p>This malware appears as an update app with a generic icon and name — for example, "App Updates" — and researchers believe it's distributed as a download link in a text message sent to the victim's phone. When a victim runs the app, it requests permission to control different parts of the phone. The attackers use social engineering to convince victims this control is necessary.</p> <p>If the victim grants permissions, the spyware disguises itself under the name and icon of a legitimate app, making it harder for the user to find and remove it. The new variants have more and varied disguises than earlier versions and hide behind the icons of popular apps like Google, Chrome, Google Play, and YouTube. If the user clicks the fake icon, the spyware launches a legitimate version of the app while conducting surveillance in the background.</p> <p>The malicious features of earlier iterations are the same: gathering text from SMS and other apps, contacts, call logs, documents, and images; recording ambient audio along with incoming and outgoing calls; taking pictures and screenshots; recording the device's screen; reading notifications from social media and messaging apps; and canceling security app notifications.</p> <p>"The Android spyware linked to APT C-23 has been around for at least four years, and attackers continue to develop it with new techniques that evade detection and removal," wrote threat researcher Pankaj Kohli in a release. "The attackers also use social engineering to lure victims into granting the permissions needed to see into every corner of their digital life."</p> <p>The C-23 APT has been active in the Middle East since 2017, and these new variants detected share code with other malware samples attributed to the group. Researchers also found Arabic language strings in the code and report some of the text could be presented in English or Arabic, depending on the language setting of a victim's device.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Some recipe apps, personal data is gravy
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/11/23/recipe-apps-privacy/
GIST	<p>Paper-and-ink cookbooks come with a few advantages compared to recipe apps: extra information about origins and ingredients, not having to incorporate your beeping phone into any good-for-the-soul cooking time, says cookbook author and critic Paula Forbes.</p> <p>There's also a third benefit: Analog cookbooks aren't sending streams of information about you to third-party advertisers.</p> <p>A new report from Mozilla Foundation, creator of the "Privacy Not Included" holiday shopping guide, found personal data streaming out of popular Android recipe apps, including precise location, detailed device information as well as scrolling and tapping behavior. Allrecipes Dinner Spinner, Recipes Home — Easy Recipes and Shopping List and Food Network Kitchen were the worst offenders in terms of the number of data requests from advertisers, according to the report.</p>

It's the latest example of the constant, behind-the-scenes monitoring that powers many of the apps we know and love. App-makers give your data to ad companies, which then combine that information with your activity on totally separate apps to target you with better ads.

Apple [launched a privacy feature](#) in April that prompts you to ask apps not to track you around, though some apps [may be quietly ignoring](#) those preferences. Google, which owns Android, says the operating system is rolling out a similar feature throughout the next year, but once it arrives, Android device owners will have to track down the setting rather than getting a pop up. Google is also introducing [a data safety section](#) in the Google Play app store in February, which will list each app's notable privacy practices as well as what categories of data it collects. As of now, however, developers aren't required to disclose which third-party companies they're sharing that data with.

Discovery, which owns the Food Network Kitchen app, said that by using the app, people agree to its privacy policy. Position Mobile, which owns Recipes Home, said that its data collection practices are consistent with its privacy policy, Google's rules and standard ad industry practices, and the privacy features available to Android users allow them to control how much information they want to share.

Meredith Corporation, which owns Allrecipes, said it takes its privacy obligations seriously.

"Recipes seem, on the surface, so benign," Forbes, who was busy testing recipes for a new cookbook, said. "It's a little upsetting if they're not."

The most egregious tracking came from Recipes Home, according to Becca Ricks, the Mozilla researcher behind the report. She observed several different trackers, including Google and Facebook, collecting data from the app. Some advertisers collected her phone's battery level, whether it was charging and whether headphones were plugged in, she said. One tracker repeatedly asked the app for data on how long people look at different ads.

Facebook didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

For many, apps sharing location and information about your smartphone with other companies behind the scenes feels like a violation of privacy.

"There's something that just feels icky about it, to know that you were using an app in one way and then that data was used in a completely different, unexpected way," Ricks said. "For me, it raises questions around consent. What am I agreeing to when I download an app?"

She said it should be Google's responsibility to rein in app tracking, rather than leaving it to customers to adjust their settings. Google wouldn't say whether it will serve a pop-up prompting people to hide their advertising IDs once that feature is available, like Apple does.

Google, for its part, says that a big part of feeling safe online is having control over your data.

"We are committed to empowering consumers to make their own choices by providing clear information about how apps use data, as well as offering advanced security and privacy controls," said Google spokesman Scott Westover.

If you fall into the "keep your hands off my personal info" camp, there are ways to work around snooping recipe apps this holiday season. If you use an Android phone, go to Settings -> Google Settings -> Ads. Toggle on "opt out of ads personalization" and tap "reset advertising ID," which wipes one identifier advertisers use to monitor your activity across different apps.

If you use an Apple device, tap "Ask app not to track" whenever you see that pop up. To review which apps are tracking you, go to Settings -> Privacy -> Tracking.

Keep in mind, though, that these steps only turn off certain advertising identifiers — unique strings of numbers assigned to your Apple or Android device. Companies can still track you by other means, such as by gathering a set of super-specific details about your phone that can act like a “fingerprint” or by assigning you a new ID that helps advertisers track you as you move around different apps.

[Our reporting found](#) that even after you ask apps not to track on an iPhone, some continue sending suspicious-looking device data behind the scenes. But Apple says it’s working to find apps that break its rules, and some privacy advocates applauded the company for creating an “ask app not track” option in the first place. Google did not say whether it plans to make similar rules against using alternate means to identify users who choose to hide their Android ad identifiers.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Apple sues NSO over Pegasus spyware
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/11/23/apple-pegasus-lawsuit-spyware-nso/
GIST	<p>Apple announced Tuesday that it has sued Israel-based NSO Group over the use of its Pegasus spyware to attack Apple devices, the latest move in an escalating global campaign to curb surveillance abuses against smartphone users.</p> <p>The suit, which seeks an injunction against NSO to stop it from using any Apple software, service or device, comes after the July publication of the Pegasus Project by The Washington Post and 16 other news organizations that detailed the use of Pegasus in dozens of attacks against journalists, human rights workers and political activists in countries across the world.</p> <p>The NSO Group has repeatedly denied the conclusions of the Pegasus Project but also has been buffeted by a series of government and other actions fueled by the consortium’s findings, including a U.S. government decision earlier this month to blacklist the company.</p> <p>NSO’s “notorious hackers” are “amoral 21st century mercenaries who have created highly sophisticated cyber-surveillance machinery that invites routine and flagrant abuse,” Apple claims in the lawsuit, which was filed in federal court in the Northern District of California.</p> <p>NSO long has defended itself by saying spyware is essential to combating crime and terrorism in a world in which most communications are encrypted, making traditional wiretapping all but impossible. Breaking into a particular device, by contrast, allows police and spies to monitor the activities of individuals it is targeting — even when they use WhatsApp, Signal or other encrypted communications tools. The company has said it licenses Pegasus to dozens of military, intelligence and law enforcement agencies around the world but not before vetting its clients.</p> <p>“Thousands of lives were saved around the world thanks to NSO Group’s technologies used by its customers,” NSO spokesman Oded Hershkovitz said in a statement Tuesday. “Pedophiles and terrorists can freely operate in technological safe-havens, and we provide governments the lawful tools to fight it. NSO group will continue to advocate for the truth.”</p> <p>Apple’s legal move follows a similar lawsuit by the Facebook-owned messaging service WhatsApp in 2019 that accused NSO of targeting 1,400 of its users with spyware. A U.S. appeals court ruled this month that the suit can proceed.</p> <p>Those seeking to curb the use of spyware praised the growing use of lawsuits and other legal tools to combat NSO and similar companies, calling such moves key to challenging an industry capable of developing a seemingly endless number of new ways to attack phones and other computerized devices. It’s a cat-and-mouse game that defenders — even at giant technology companies — are doomed to lose given the sprawling and ever-changing nature of software, experts say.</p> <p>“You’re never going to get rid of all of the exploits,” said Johns Hopkins security researcher Matthew D. Green, using a common term for the software weaknesses exploited by hackers. He said lawsuits make it</p>

harder for companies like NSO Group to make big profits. “When companies like Apple turn on NSO and make it so that [surveillance] is not a profitable activity anymore, that’s a good thing.”

In announcing its lawsuit, Apple singled out a particular attack on iPhones called FORCEDENTRY that had been [discovered](#) by researchers for Citizen Lab, a technology research group at the University of Toronto that has long worked to detail abuses of Pegasus. Apple [released](#) a patch for the vulnerability shortly after Citizen Lab reported it to the company in September.

“State-sponsored actors like the NSO Group spend millions of dollars on sophisticated surveillance technologies without effective accountability. That needs to change,” Craig Federighi, Apple’s senior vice president of software engineering, said in a [blog post announcing the lawsuit](#).

“Apple devices are the most secure consumer hardware on the market — but private companies developing state-sponsored spyware have become even more dangerous,” he wrote. “While these cybersecurity threats only impact a very small number of our customers, we take any attack on our users very seriously, and we’re constantly working to strengthen the security and privacy protections in iOS to keep all our users safe.”

Among the findings of the Pegasus Project was that iPhones, despite their reputation for strong security compared with some other smartphones, [had weaknesses](#) that the NSO Group had learned to exploit to deliver spyware to the phones of targets.

In some cases NSO customers delivered Pegasus in such a stealthy way that users got no alert and needed to take no action in order for an infection to begin on their devices. Such “zero-click attacks” were an advance over previous generations that relied on users clicking on malicious links in text messages or other communication on their devices.

Once inside, Pegasus turned smartphones into sophisticated spying devices, revealing their locations, communications, pictures and other information. Pegasus, which also can be used to target Android devices, can activate microphones and cameras without users knowing.

The lawsuit accuses NSO of enabling customers to target U.S. citizens, despite the company’s pledge that its spyware “cannot be used to conduct cybersurveillance within the United States.”

Apple also said it was donating \$10 million to support cybersecurity researchers and advocates against spyware. The company also said in its blog post that it had made recent improvements in its latest mobile operating system, iOS 15, and in particular to its Blast Door feature that’s intended to defend against malware, including Pegasus. It also is notifying users successfully attacked using the FORCEDENTRY exploit.

But by taking the fight to federal court, Apple has signaled that it is moving beyond technical approaches to combating spyware to challenging the companies that make such hacking easy to execute, even for governments without advanced technological abilities.

“What Apple has done ... is putting NSO’s business model into the toxic category for all but the most unscrupulous investors,” said John Scott-Railton, a senior researcher at Citizen Lab.

Apple is suing under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which was enacted in 1986, long before anyone imagined the interconnected world of mobile computing that now dominates everything from commerce to pop culture.

Legal experts say it’s still unclear whether the law, which prohibits anyone from “intentionally accessing a computer without authorization,” applies to companies like NSO Group. The company has argued in other lawsuits, including the one filed by WhatsApp, that it does not.

“It’s something that is sort of cutting-edge when it comes to computer law,” said Tor Ekeland, a defense attorney who often represents clients accused of hacking offenses.

Apple also attempts to thread a legal needle, acknowledging that Apple itself wasn’t the target of the hacks, but that it was still victimized because NSO abused “Apple services and servers to perpetrate attacks on Apple’s users and data stored on users’ devices.” That may be an overreach, said Orin Kerr, a University of California, Berkeley professor who focuses on computer crime law. “Suing a company based on hacking somebody else’s computer is pretty novel,” he said.

The [legal complaint](#) argues that the federal court in Northern California has jurisdiction in the case because NSO allegedly “created more than one hundred Apple IDs to carry out their attacks and also agreed to Apple’s iCloud Terms and Conditions (‘iCloud Terms’), including a mandatory and enforceable forum selection and exclusive jurisdiction clause that constitutes express consent to the jurisdiction of this Court.” Apple is based in Cupertino, Calif.

NSO has suffered a series of devastating blows in the months since the Pegasus Project investigation. This month, after the Commerce Department added the company to its red-flagged “entity list,” NSO’s new chief executive [announced](#) his resignation after only two weeks in the role. The U.S. government action has been seen as a Biden administration rebuke to the Israeli government, which approves all NSO Group exports — essentially dictating which countries can use Pegasus — but failed to prevent the abuses detailed in the Pegasus Project.

The company also faces significant financial peril. The credit rating agency Moody’s [downgraded](#) the company Monday, saying it faced an “increased risk” of default on hundreds of millions of dollars in debt.

In recent months, an internal investigation discovered traces of Pegasus spyware in the phones of five French cabinet ministers. And in the United Kingdom, a High Court judgment last month [confirmed](#) that the phones of Princess Haya, the ex-wife of Dubai’s ruler, as well as those of her legal and security advisers had been targeted with a Pegasus hack.

The White House [raised concerns](#) about NSO’s spyware to the Israeli government in July. Beyond the Commerce Department’s blacklist, members of Congress have also pushed for more severe financial sanctions and other measures to combat the spyware’s abuse.

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HEADLINE	11/23 DOH digital alternative to vaccine card
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3248988/state-launches-wa-verify-digital-alternative-vaccine-card/
GIST	<p>The Washington Department of Health has officially launched its “WA Verify” tool, giving people the option to verify their COVID-19 vaccination status with a unique QR code rather than a physical card.</p> <p>To get your code, you’ll need to fill out your name, date of birth, and either your phone number or email on the WA Verify website at this link. You will then receive a link to your digital vaccination record, which can be saved to your smartphone or computer. The QR code can also be stored on Apple Wallet or Google Pay apps on mobile devices.</p> <p>Those who were vaccinated through a federal agency like the Department of Defense, Veteran Affairs, or Indian Health Services will need to contact those agencies directly.</p> <p>The tool is designed to operate as a more convenient way to provide proof of vaccination in counties or cities where it’s required for access to select indoor businesses. That includes King County, which mandates either proof of vaccine or of a negative COVID test for patrons at restaurants, bars, music venues, theaters, gyms, and large events.</p> <p>Both Clallam and Jefferson counties have similar requirements for restaurants and bars as well.</p>

	<p>“More businesses, events, and employers are requiring people to be vaccinated. We ask that you respect the rules of the room and be prepared in advance to show the type of vaccination proof requested,” state Secretary of Health Dr. Umair Shah said in a news release. “If you have plans to go to an event or want to grab dinner with a friend, please do not wait until the last minute to verify your vaccination status – prepare ahead of time by taking those steps today.”</p> <p>The WA Verify tool appeared to have briefly been soft-launched in late October after an FAQ page went live. The page was taken down hours later, with its more formal debut occurring this week.</p> <p>The DOH reports that as of Nov. 22, over 80% of the state’s population ages 12 and up has received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, while 74% in the demographic have now been fully vaccinated.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 HC3 warns healthcare of zero-day attacks
SOURCE	https://www.hipaajournal.com/hhs-warns-healthcare-sector-about-risk-of-zero-day-attacks/
GIST	<p>The HHS’ Health Sector Cybersecurity Coordination Center (HC3) has issued a threat brief warning the healthcare and public health sector about an increase in financially motivated zero-day attacks, outlining mitigation tactics that should be adopted to reduce risk to a low and acceptable level.</p> <p>A zero-day attack leverages a vulnerability for which a patch has yet to be released. The vulnerabilities are referred to as zero-day, as the developer has had no time to release a patch to correct the flaw.</p> <p>Zero-day attacks are those where a threat actor has exploited a zero-day vulnerability using a weaponized exploit for the flaw. Zero-day vulnerabilities are exploited in attacks on all industry sectors and are not only a problem for the healthcare industry. For instance, in 2010, exploits were developed for four zero-day vulnerabilities in the “Stuxnet” attack on the Iranian nuclear program, which caused Iranian centrifuges to self-destruct to disrupt Iran’s nuclear program.</p> <p>More recently in 2017, a zero-day vulnerability was exploited to deliver the Dridex banking Trojan. While it would normally be necessary for an individual to take additional actions after opening a malicious email attachment for malware to be downloaded, by including an exploit for a zero-day vulnerability the threat actors were able to install the Dridex banking Trojan if an individual simply opened an infected email attachment. A zero-day vulnerability in the SonicWall SMA 100 Series VPN by the UNC2447 threat group to deliver FiveHands ransomware.</p> <p>The very nature of zero-day vulnerabilities means it is not possible to eliminate risk entirely, as software developers need to develop patches to fix the vulnerabilities, but strategies can be adopted to reduce the potential for zero-day vulnerabilities to be exploited.</p> <p>The number of detected exploits for zero-day vulnerabilities more than doubled between 2019 and 2021. This is, in part, due to the high value of exploits for zero-day flaws. The price paid for working exploits rose by more than 1,150% between 2018 and 2021. While the market for zero-day exploits was limited to a handful of groups with deep pockets, there are now many threat actors with considerable resources that are willing to pay as they know they can make their money back many times over by using the exploits in their attacks. Now, an exploit for a zero-day vulnerability could be worth more than \$1 million.</p> <p>Zero-day attacks specifically conducted against the healthcare sector are a very real possibility. In August this year, a zero-day vulnerability dubbed PwnedPiper was identified in the pneumatic tube systems used in hospitals to transport biological samples and medications. The vulnerability was identified in the control panel, which would allow unsigned firmware updates to be applied. An attacker could exploit the flaw and take control of the system and deploy ransomware.</p> <p>In August 2020, four zero-day vulnerabilities were identified that exposed OpenClinic patients’ test results. Unauthenticated attackers could successfully request files containing sensitive documents from the medical test directory, including medical test results.</p>

	<p>The best defense against zero-day vulnerabilities is to patch promptly, but patching is often slow, especially in healthcare. In 2019, a survey conducted by the Ponemon Institute revealed the average time to apply, test, and deploy a patch for a zero-day vulnerability was 97 days after the patch was released.</p> <p>The advice of HC3 is to “patch early, patch often, patch completely.” HC3 provides up-to-date information on actively exploited zero-days and the available patches to fix zero-day flaws. HC3 also suggests implementing a web-application firewall to review incoming traffic and filter out malicious input, as this can prevent threat actors from gaining access to vulnerable systems. It is also recommended to use runtime application self-protection (RASP) agents, which sit inside applications’ runtime and can detect anomalous behavior. Segmenting networks is also strongly recommended.</p>
Return to Top	<i>The TLP: WHITE Zero-Day Threat Brief is available for download on this link.</i>

HEADLINE	11/23 Top cyber threats to healthcare industry
SOURCE	https://www.zerofox.com/blog/cyber-threats-to-healthcare-industry/
GIST	<p>The healthcare industry is one of the world’s largest and fastest-growing critical industries. Amid the Coronavirus pandemic, the healthcare industry endured a rapid digital transformation. Sensitive information from healthcare companies, such as personally identifiable information (PII), personal health information (PHI), personal health record (PHR), lab results, test reports, and research data are extremely valuable to cybercriminals. Due to the value of such data, cyber threats to healthcare are now targeting scientists, researchers, business logistics firms, and distribution networks using a variety of threat tactics, like disrupting vaccine supplies, for economic gain or geopolitical advantage.</p> <p>Top Cyber Threats to Healthcare Organizations</p> <p>One of the top cyber threats to healthcare was in 2020 against the British drugmaker, AstraZeneca. AstraZeneca was in the race to deploy a COVID-19 vaccine when threat actors targeted AstraZeneca employees working on COVID-19 research. The attackers used social engineering tactics to break into the drug manufacturer’s network, where they impersonated recruiters and approached AstraZeneca employees with fake job offers via social networking platforms like LinkedIn and WhatsApp. Security researchers suspect the involvement of the North Korean threat actors based on the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) used in the attack. According to reports, the attackers were not thought to have been successful.</p> <p>In December 2020, cybersecurity researchers uncovered a spear-phishing campaign targeting executives at organizations that support the Cold Chain Equipment Optimization Platform (CCEOP) program started by Gavi, the vaccine Alliance, which assists vaccine distribution around the globe. The attackers impersonated business executives from Haier Biomedical, a Chinese company, serving as a qualified supplier for the CCEOP program, in coordination with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and other U.N. agencies. It remains unclear to the researchers whether the phishing campaign was successful.</p> <p>In March 2021, a Chinese-state-sponsored actor group, APT10, also known as Stone Panda, targeted the IT systems of two Indian COVID-19 vaccine makers: Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India (SII). The attackers discovered security vulnerabilities in the IT infrastructure and supply chain software used by these vaccine makers. Security researchers revealed that the motivation was to steal the intellectual property, which could have helped the threat actors get a competitive advantage over Indian pharmaceutical companies.</p> <p>Another attack was against the US pharmaceutical giant, ExecuPharm. The pharmaceutical firm suffered a data breach and ransomware attack after being targeted by phishing emails sent to employees. The attackers encrypted the ExecuPharm servers, stole corporate and employee data, and sought payment in return for a decryption key.</p> <p>Top Vulnerabilities</p>

Critical vulnerabilities in various technologies pose a severe threat to the healthcare industry. According to research conducted by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the United Kingdom's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), critical vulnerabilities in VPN products from Citrix, Pulse Secure, Fortinet, and Palo Alto are widely used by various APT groups against medical industries.

The details are listed below:

Citrix:

- CVE-2019-19781: Citrix Application Delivery Controller And Gateway Code Execution

Pulse Connect Secure:

- CVE-2019-11510: Pulse Connect Secure Information Disclosure
- CVE-2019-11539: Pulse Connect Secure And Pulse Policy Secure Command Execution

Fortinet:

- CVE-2018-13379: FortiOS Vpn Web Portal Directory Traversal
- CVE-2018-13382: FortiOS Security Bypass
- CVE-2018-13383: FortiOS Denial of Service

Palo Alto:

- CVE-2019-1579: PAN-OS Code Execution

The Chinese-state-sponsored threat actor group APT10 was observed attempting to exploit Windows Zerologon vulnerability in attacks. Tracked as CVE-2020-1472, Zerologon is a critical vulnerability that allows attackers to execute arbitrary code with escalated privileges on a vulnerable system.

Top Threat Actors and Groups

Several threat actor groups have targeted healthcare industries in the past. Some of the well-known groups are listed below along with their known or suspected country of origin and attack methods.

APT10 (Stone Panda):

- Country: China (State-sponsored)
- Attack Methods: Malware, Exploiting vulnerabilities in the web applications/systems.

APT1 (PLA Unit 61398):

- Country: China
- Attack Methods: Malware, Exploiting vulnerabilities in the web applications/systems.

APT41 (Double Dragon):

- Country: China
- Attack Methods: Malware, Passive backdoor, Exploiting vulnerabilities in the web applications/systems.

APT35 (Charming Kitten):

- Country: Iran
- Attack Methods: Malware, Exploiting vulnerabilities in the web applications/systems.

APT28 (Fancy Bear):

- Country: Russian Federation
- Attack Methods: Malware, Spear-phishing, Mimikatz, Core-shell.

Other than APT groups, some data brokers sold remote access exploits in various cybercriminal underground networks and forums, which can be utilized by threat actor groups or attackers to get access into a network. ZeroFox Threat Intelligence observed one example of an actor on a Russian-speaking cybercriminal forum advertising the sale of remote access exploits, targeting pharmaceutical companies, among other industries.

Motivation

Over the last year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant rise in cyberattacks has been observed against healthcare industries, specifically the vaccines manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies. Vaccine manufacturers across the globe were in a race to develop a vaccine for the COVID-19 virus, giving threat actors opportunities to leverage cyber threats against targets. Threat actors quickly utilized the pandemic and related fears to lure victims into phishing and malware attacks. In the middle of July 2020, there were multiple [reports](#) of cyberattacks to steal COVID-19 vaccine data from the organizations that were involved in vaccine development. The motive behind most of the attacks was financial gain.

However, [some](#) of the state-sponsored targeted attacks against vaccine manufacturers was to steal intellectual property and slow down vaccine distribution, indicating that financial gain was not the only motive behind the attack.

Intended Effect of Cyber Threats to Healthcare

According to security researchers, the primary target of these attackers is the intellectual properties of organizations. It can harm the competitive advantage and the financial foundation of businesses. Apart from the financial gain, some targeted attacks focus on slowing down or disrupting vaccine distribution. Credential harvesting is also one of the goals of attackers. Stolen credentials allow threat actors to move laterally through a network, conducting surveillance and accumulating additional confidential information from the victim's environment for future operations.

Conclusion

With the rapid pace of digital transformation and the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic still greatly felt, the healthcare industry is a prime target for threat actors today. Security teams must ensure that the health records, PII and research data collected and produced by their institutions are secure against data breaches, ransomware and other top cyber threats. Ensuring security controls are in place and that teams have visibility into the networks where much of this threat activity takes place such as the dark web are critical.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Holiday shopping-themed mobile attacks
SOURCE	https://www.proofpoint.com/us/blog/corporate-news/holiday-shopping-themed-mobile-attacks-increase-dramatically
GIST	<p>Proofpoint researchers have identified a massive global increase in holiday-themed mobile/text (SMS) phishing (smishing), almost double from this same time last year. Over two-thirds of all SMS messages sent worldwide are related in some form to an order delivery or consumer retail brand. With Black Friday and the holiday shopping season fast approaching, mobile users must remain vigilant as they are inundated with SMS messages promising everything from package/gift deliveries, to special retail offers, to alerts of delivery exceptions.</p> <p>Cybercriminals continue to prey upon mobile users with smishing attacks that claim to be from reputable companies, including prominent retailers, ecommerce brands, and parcel delivery companies. These lures attempt to steal personal information from unsuspecting targets.</p> <p>Many of these lures request credit card information to resolve an issue supposedly related to the purchase or delivery of a nonexistent item. In other cases, the attackers attempt to steal personal information through an enticing URL or landing page.</p> <p>For example, in the “Early Bird Black Friday” package delivery smishing attack below, the landing page presents an authentic looking package notification. Following multiple pages related to this fake delivery, the website requests personal information from the potential victim, including their name, postal, and email addresses.</p> <p>Mobile threats such as these are dangerous for many reasons, particularly as enterprises increasingly make mobile their primary communication channel.</p> <p>Trust</p> <p>Email users are gradually learning that opening attachments from strangers, clicking on questionable links, and visiting web pages with multiple redirects are risky behaviors. But by comparison, mobile users are not nearly as cautious. As organizations migrate from office servers to remote work deployments with a broad mix of devices, people increasingly communicate solely through their phone. While certainly more convenient, research shows that security best practices have not accompanied employees in this migration.</p> <p>Consider this SMS data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Text messages have a 98 percent open rate; recipients open 90 percent within 3 minutes

- Text messages have [8x the click-thru rate](#) vs. email

Awareness

Any communication channel growing this fast is ripe for abuse. Fueled by the trust consumers have in their mobile devices, SMS attacks around the world are experiencing exponential growth. While misplaced trust is fueling this trend, so is a lack of awareness. SMS threats benefit from this knowledge gap.

Consider that [69% of people globally](#) are unaware of or don't accurately know what smishing is. With 98 percent text message open rates and 8x click-through vs. email, the enormous damage mobile malware can do quickly becomes apparent.

Business Adoption

As people have continued migrating from email to mobile communications, marketing campaigns have followed. Mobile messaging is now the fastest growing and most highly trusted marketing channel. The creators of email marketing campaigns have increasingly turned their focus to text messages. Customers are becoming more comfortable interacting with merchants who text them with promotions, deals, and package notifications. This cuts both ways, as enterprises have also opened mobile channels to hear from their customers. The following data bears this out:

- [61 percent](#) of global companies have been attacked by smishing
- [81 percent](#) of U.S. companies have suffered the same fate

No matter the communications channel, malicious actors will always follow the money. During the past year, SMS attacks have grown exponentially, because those actors discovered a trusting and captive audience ready to engage on the other end of the phone. It is critical to remain vigilant.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Massive hack: window to criminal activity
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/massive-hack-gave-police-a-window-on-cocaine-cash-and-killers-11637680356?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS—The gangsters plotting to assassinate a judge thought they were leaving nothing to chance. But cops hundreds of miles away were on to them thanks to a stakeout with a modern twist.</p> <p>Using supposedly impregnable encrypted phones, the Serbian hit men discussed earlier this year how wind direction and distance could affect the sniper's bullet and planned their getaway. Unbeknown to them, their messages were also flashing up on the computer screens of a secret police team in Belgium that had hacked into the messenger service, called Sky ECC. The Belgians warned police in Serbia, who whisked the judge to safety.</p> <p>The infiltration was a signature success in efforts by authorities across the world to counter encrypted communications—a powerful new tool for criminal gangs to hide their identities and hatch plans in secret.</p> <p>Special handsets with a secure chat app and most other functions disabled have helped criminals flood Europe with cocaine, turning it into a rival of the U.S. for the world's biggest market, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.</p> <p>But when authorities got inside the networks, they gained an unobstructed view of the gangs at work—and the chance to thwart them. For three weeks in February and March, Belgian officials say they eavesdropped as criminals used Sky to coordinate massive drug shipments, plan hits and exchange photos of cash, cocaine and corpses.</p> <p>“It’s their Achilles’ heel,” said Kevin Daniels, the DEA’s deputy chief for Europe. “Oftentimes we’re two or three steps behind. They are looking for the latest technological advantage over us. But we’re finding a way to catch up.”</p>

Law-enforcement officials say infiltrating Sky was the largest of several [recent strikes against encrypted platforms](#). Authorities gathered roughly one billion messages from tens of thousands of Sky-enabled devices world-wide, which could feed investigations for years. Belgium has detained more than 500 suspects and seized 88 metric tons of cocaine, already exceeding last year's record haul.

"Sky was monstrous," said Scott A. Albrecht, who served as the DEA's attaché in Belgium until July. "It was so global and such a volume of messages."

This account of the international operation against Sky is based on interviews with a half-dozen officials from Belgium and the DEA, as well as public accounts from U.S., Belgian and other European officials. The company that owned Sky, Vancouver-based Sky Global Inc., has denied any wrongdoing and said the platform had the legitimate aim of protecting privacy, not facilitating criminals. Sky Global says it relied in many cases on third-party resellers to distribute its devices and sought to prevent them from supplying criminals.

It was 2018 when Belgian police began picking up cellphone handsets that they couldn't read. But when authorities mapped where similar phones were connecting to transmission towers, they found locations that were familiar from their efforts to counter the torrent of cocaine entering Europe via ports like Antwerp.

Sky, through its website and a network of resellers, offered [Apple](#), Google and [BlackBerry](#) handsets loaded with sophisticated encryption software and with their GPS, cameras and microphones disabled. Messages were automatically deleted after 48 hours if the contact wasn't reachable, and devices could be wiped remotely. Sky billed the platform as impenetrable and offered a prize of up to \$5 million to anyone who could hack it.

Sky had tens of thousands of active users from the U.S. to Colombia to the Middle East. According to Belgian prosecutors, around one-quarter were in Belgium and the Netherlands, two of the main gateways to Europe for cocaine.

Sky said its target market was people and entities concerned with data privacy and confidentiality, such as doctors, government contractors and celebrities. But the locator map appeared to confirm that the phones, with contracts costing as much as \$2,500 for six months, were being used almost exclusively by criminals.

Authorities needed to establish whether it was a legitimate target for infiltration, so they turned to traditional sleuthing methods. When a phone connected to a tower, revealing its location, they would use security cameras and dispatch surveillance teams to identify the users. Many of them turned out to be people suspected of involvement in drug-related crimes.

Authorities tracked a Sky server to northern France and worked with officials there to gain access. At first, they could only see the metadata, including the nicknames of users and the names of group chats, but not the messages. Then, an international team of hackers from as far afield as Australia found a way to decrypt roughly half of the three million daily messages.

"That was the Holy Grail," said Belgian Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne.

Authorities launched a live operation in mid-February, reading messages in near-real-time and seeking to thwart criminals or catch them red-handed. Dozens of Belgian police across two sites in Brussels and Antwerp, along with teams in France and the Netherlands, tracked the conversations of top targets and received messages from others filtered for keywords by artificial intelligence.

The messages and photos pinging across the world astounded even experienced investigators. Users, confident in the platform's impregnability, shared pictures of corpses, severed heads and other body parts, as well as bricks of cocaine and stacks of cash. One user sent a photograph to demonstrate he had carried out an order to torture a victim. When one enforcer in a Western European country couldn't find the man

he was supposed to pummel, he received new instructions: “Here are pictures of the wife. You can break her legs.”

The messages revealed new connections and methods, from Belgian links with Italian organized crime to laboratories used by Colombians to extract cocaine hidden in fruit juice or melted into the plastic of toy dolls.

“Normally in an investigation, you have to dig a lot to find a small piece of gold,” said Belgian Federal Prosecutor Frédéric Van Leeuw. “Here, we had an open gold mine.”

The teams had to decide whether to act on the information, given the risk of exposing the operation, but always did so in case of threats to life. In one case, a message indicated that a gang in Canada was about to begin torturing a captive. The Belgians called authorities there to intervene.

Police also used information about shipments to seize tons of cocaine, although the big targets would sometimes shrug off the losses as they were making so much money. A kilo of cocaine costs €4,000 in Colombia, the equivalent of around \$4,500, but rises to €50,000 in Belgium, where it is cut, increasing profits.

“They said, ‘Forget about it,’” said Mr. Van Leeuw.

After police seized a large consignment at the port in Antwerp, one group exchanged messages blaming a partner for snitching and proposing to kill him. Authorities decided to end the operation instead of risking an outbreak of violence.

On March 9, 1,600 Belgian police officers carried out more than 200 searches across the country, detaining 48 suspects.

Three days later, the U.S. Department of Justice said that a federal grand jury in San Diego had indicted the chief executive of Sky Global and an associate on racketeering and drug-trafficking charges, saying the encrypted phones had facilitated the distribution of drugs. A court issued warrants for their arrest, and the U.S. government seized the company’s websites, essentially forcing the shutdown of the encrypted service.

Lawyers for Sky Global filed a legal complaint this month in a federal court in San Diego, alleging that the U.S. government had improperly shut down Sky ECC and painted the executives as criminals for providing encrypted technology. The motion [asked the government to return the company’s web domains](#), saying that it had taken measures to prevent its use for illegal activity, such as cutting off unscrupulous resellers.

Since the busts in March, police in Belgium have identified nearly 2,500 suspects and detained hundreds more, from suspected gangsters to police commanders and employees from port terminals, shipping firms and security companies. Several hundred police officers are pursuing further investigations. The first trial using the intercepted messages is set to start in January.

Meanwhile, officials say criminals are adapting by communicating across several platforms, for example by sending the numbers of containers containing shipments of cocaine in two parts via different services. Others are using popular messengers like WhatsApp, seeking to hide among the deluge of communications over such platforms.

New platforms are also popping up.

“It’s like whack-a-mole,” said the DEA’s Mr. Albrecht. “You hit one on the head, and then there comes two more.”

Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	11/24 UAE, Taliban in talks over Kabul airport
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/world/globaltalk/uae-taliban-kabul-airport/2021/11/24/id/1045974/
GIST	<p>The United Arab Emirates has held talks with the Taliban to run Kabul airport, going up against Gulf rival Qatar in a diplomatic tussle for influence with Afghanistan's new rulers, according to four sources with knowledge of the matter.</p> <p>UAE officials have held a series of discussions with the group in recent weeks to discuss operating the airport that serves as landlocked Afghanistan's main air link to the world, the foreign diplomats based in the Gulf region told Reuters.</p> <p>The talks demonstrate how countries are seeking to assert their influence in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan even as the hardline Islamist group largely remains an international pariah and its government is not formally recognized by any country.</p> <p>The Emiratis are keen to counter diplomatic clout enjoyed there by Qatar, according to the sources who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter.</p> <p>The Qataris have been helping run the Hamid Karzai International Airport along with Turkey after playing a major role in evacuation efforts following the chaotic U.S. withdrawal in August, and have said they are willing to take over the operations.</p> <p>Yet the Taliban has not yet formalized an arrangement with Qatar, the four diplomats said.</p> <p>A senior Emirati foreign ministry official said the UAE, which previously ran Kabul airport during the U.S.-backed Afghan republic, "remains committed to continuing to assist in operating" it to ensure humanitarian access and safe passage.</p> <p>Abu Dhabi also aided recent evacuation efforts.</p> <p>The Taliban and Qatari authorities did not respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>Two of the diplomats said the Taliban has also sought financial assistance from the UAE, though they added it was not clear if this was related to the airport discussions.</p> <p>The Emirati foreign ministry official, Salem Al Zaabi, director of international security cooperation, did not respond to a question on whether the UAE was considering providing financial help to the Taliban.</p> <p>AIRPORT INTELLIGENCE</p> <p>One key issue that's still to be resolved between the Taliban and potential airport operators is who would provide security at the site, the four diplomats said. The Taliban say they do not want foreign forces in the country following their return to power after two decades of war.</p> <p>Still, Qatari special forces are presently providing security within the airport's perimeter, the diplomats added, while Taliban special forces were patrolling areas outside.</p> <p>So far countries have been reluctant to formally recognize the Taliban's government, accusing the group of backtracking on pledges to uphold the rights of women and minorities.</p>

Yet Qatari officials have urged greater international engagement with the Taliban to prevent impoverished Afghanistan from falling into a humanitarian crisis. Gulf states have also voiced concern that the U.S. withdrawal would allow al-Qaida to regain a foothold in Afghanistan.

While there is little commercial benefit for any operator, the airport would provide a much-needed source of intelligence on movements in and out of the country, according to the four diplomats, who said that since the withdrawal many countries have lacked real-time information.

REGIONAL RIVALRIES

Qatar and the UAE have had strained relations for years as they competed for regional influence.

The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and their allies boycotted Qatar for over three years, cutting off political, trade, and transport ties, accusing Doha of supporting terrorism - a charge that it denies. The dispute was resolved in January this year.

Qatar has long been the gateway to the Taliban, with Doha hosting the group's political office since 2013 and negotiations with the U.S. in early 2020 that led to the withdrawal.

Last week, Qatari officials strengthened their position by signing an accord to represent American diplomatic interests in Afghanistan.

The UAE has maintained ties with the Taliban too, according to two of the diplomats. They said the country had been home to some members of the group in recent years, including Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, who they added lived in the Sharjah emirate with his family from at least 2013. Stanikzai is now deputy foreign minister in the Taliban administration.

Al Zaabi did not respond to questions on the UAE's relationship with Stanikzai. The Taliban did not immediately respond to queries on Stanikzai living in the UAE.

The Taliban said this month that the UAE had reopened its embassy in Kabul. The UAE has not commented.

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HEADLINE	11/24 US to resume talks w/Taliban next week
SOURCE	https://www.dawn.com/news/1659972
GIST	<p>The United States will resume talks with the Taliban next week in Qatar, addressing among other issues the fight against terrorism and the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.</p> <p>The American delegation will be led by the US special representative for Afghanistan, Tom West, for the planned two weeks of discussions, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Tuesday.</p> <p>The two sides will discuss “our vital national interests” which include counterterrorism operations against the militant Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda, humanitarian assistance, Afghanistan's devastated economy, and safe passage out of Afghanistan for US citizens and Afghans who worked for the United States during the 20-year war.</p> <p>West met two weeks ago in Pakistan with representatives of the Taliban that seized power in August as US forces completed their withdrawal.</p> <p>A first session between the two sides was held October 9-10 in the Qatari capital Doha, where US diplomats overseeing relations with Afghanistan transferred after the Taliban takeover.</p> <p>West on Friday reiterated US conditions for the Taliban to receive US financial and diplomatic support: fight terrorism, install an inclusive government, respect the rights of minorities, women and girls, and provide equal access to educations and employment.</p>

	<p>He said the United States would continue to have dialogue with the Taliban and for now provide only humanitarian aid.</p> <p>Foreign minister of the Taliban government, Amir Khan Muttaqi, which is not recognised by the international community, called last week in an open letter to the US Congress for the release of Afghan assets frozen by the US.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/24 Australia: 2 groups as terror organizations
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-lists-neo-nazi-group-hezbollah-terrorist-organisations-2021-11-24/
GIST	<p>CANBERRA, Nov 24 (Reuters) - Australia on Wednesday classified neo-Nazi organisation The Base and Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and militant group, as terrorist organisations.</p> <p>The classification makes it illegal for anyone to be a member of The Base, the white supremacist group formed in 2018, or Hezbollah. Anyone convicted of being a member can be imprisoned for up to 25 years.</p> <p>"There is absolutely no place in Australia for violent extremism. There is no cause – religious or ideological – that can justify killing innocent people," Minister for Home Affairs Karen Andrews told reporters in Canberra.</p> <p>Hezbollah is not believed to be active in Australia, though authorities have said The Base has actively sought to develop cells.</p> <p>Andrews declined to specify how many members of The Base there are in Australia. The Base was formed in the United States and has been listed as a terrorist organisation in Canada and Britain.</p> <p>U.S. ally Australia is on heightened alert after a series of “lone wolf” attacks in recent years.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Extremists encourage holiday violence
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/terrorism-study/holiday-terror-threats-how-extremists-encourage-violence-during-the-season/
GIST	<p>Though police have not ascribed a terror motive to Sunday’s deadly incident in which an SUV drove into crowds at a Wisconsin Christmas parade, the scene invariably brought to mind the vulnerabilities exploited in the 2016 attacks on the Bastille Day crowds in Nice and the Breitscheidplatz Christmas market in Berlin: Soft targets without secure perimeters. Packed crowds that increased the casualty count from the use of a vehicle as a weapon. Crowds that were distracted by joyful holiday activities and not necessarily on alert for danger.</p> <p>Extremist movements and lone actors have favored targets connected to holidays for these logistical reasons – ease of attack, ability to effectively use simple weapons, crowds that may be oblivious to the threat – or for symbolic reasons if the intended target, date, or victims align with an ideological motive. These can combine; for example, if a person with antisemitic beliefs opportunistically decides to attack a Jewish community location after noticing light security on an important date for either the faith of the victims or the faith of the attacker.</p> <p>Holiday attacks present a conundrum for security services that are trying to keep venues and celebrations protected while keeping a sense of openness and welcoming during observations of community traditions.</p> <p>The National Terrorism Advisory System bulletin released earlier this month warned of a continuing “diverse and challenging threat environment” as several religious holidays and associated mass gatherings approach “that in the past have served as potential targets for acts of violence.” Domestic violent extremists and individuals inspired by foreign terrorist organizations have targeted crowded commercial</p>

facilities, houses of worship, and public gatherings, and continued reopenings coupled with potential “ongoing societal and economic disruptions due to the pandemic, as well as mass gatherings associated with several dates of religious significance over the next few months, could provide increased targets of opportunity for violence, though there are currently no credible or imminent threats tied to any dates or locations.”

Online propaganda and messaging are playing a critical role in the ongoing threat environment, NTAS continued, as both foreign and domestic threat actors “continue to introduce, amplify, and disseminate narratives online that promote violence, and have called for violence against elected officials, political representatives, government facilities, law enforcement, religious communities or commercial facilities, and perceived ideological opponents.”

Terror propaganda and tutorials are easily accessible online for lone actors and groups of any ideology to access and use as inspiration or instruction. Past attacks and threats can provide some guidance on what has been attractive to violent extremists, how these threats may be adapted to realities on the ground today, and how both security officials and holiday revelers can prepare for a worst-case scenario in conjunction with focusing on the joy of the season.

Thanksgiving

In a 2016 issue of ISIS’ now-defunct Rumiya magazine, the terror group used a tutorial-style format to encourage followers to emulate Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel’s cargo truck attack on the Bastille Day revelers in France. ISIS directed would-be terrorists to steer clear of passenger cars and “off-roaders, SUVs, and four-wheel drive vehicles” as they can “lack the necessary attributes required for causing a blood bath” and “smaller vehicles lack the weight and wheel span required for crushing many victims.” The magazine displayed a picture of a U-Haul, calling it “an affordable weapon”; in 2017, an attacker used a pickup rented from Home Depot to ram cyclists and runners along the Hudson River in Manhattan, killing eight. ISIS also showed a photo of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, describing the annual holiday tradition as “an excellent target.”

“Any outdoor attraction that draws large crowds,” the terror group noted, makes for an attractive target, especially “low security” gatherings deemed “fair game and more devastating to Crusader nations.” While the Macy’s parade is not low-security, primers on vehicle attacks and emphasis on targeting large crowds and soft targets have been a recurring theme in terror propaganda. “The target should be on a road that offers the ability to accelerate to a high speed, which allows for inflicting maximum damage on those in the vehicle’s path,” ISIS said in the Rumiya article.

Violent extremists’ focus over the Thanksgiving weekend would not be limited to parades but crowded stores on Black Friday – the alleged manifesto of accused El Paso Walmart shooter Patrick Crusius, still circulated among domestic extremists, advised others to “pick low hanging fruit” and “attack low security targets.” Increased air travel would also pique the interest of extremists who could attempt attacks not just on flights but on travel infrastructure and related crowded areas. A magazine published by al-Qaeda supports to mark 20 years since the 9/11 attacks argued that the tactic of using planes as weapons is “an open door even to lone wolves” and that “aircraft operations are not limited to the orientation of the aircraft as a weapon,” such as planting explosives in cargo.

Hanukkah

In 2019, on the seventh night of Hanukkah, a masked assailant entered a party at the home of a Hasidic rabbi in Monsey, N.Y., and stabbed five people, killing one. He was blocked from then attempting to enter the synagogue next door. Grafton Thomas, who has a history of antisemitic writings and browser searches, was found mentally incompetent to stand trial and was committed.

Important days in the Jewish faith are a potential target for extremism rooted in antisemitism – including white supremacists, neo-Nazis, conspiracy theory extremists, and Islamist extremists – but the threat is especially concerning in today’s environment of rising antisemitic attacks not necessarily linked to holy days. At an August Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing on the domestic extremist threat, Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at

California State University, San Bernardino, warned that antisemitic hate crimes were up 135 percent in New York City and 53 percent in Los Angeles and “heading for records.” Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO and national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said that a “drastic and disturbing rise in anti-Semitic activity across America” has been fueled by social media and “the problem we see is that violence motivated by hate, antisemitism, and other forms of bigotry increasingly has been normalized.”

Robert Bowers, who stands accused of picking Shabbat services in 2018 to launch the deadliest attack on the American Jewish community, is hailed as a hero in the antisemitic cesspool of meme culture, with domestic extremists urging others to emulate his actions and Nike “Just Do It” branding superimposed on his mugshot. And the pre-attack open letter attributed to 2019 Poway synagogue shooter John Earnest, who chose the last day of Passover for his attack and wrote that there is “no other option” than to kill Jews while asserting that his motive was based in Christianity, also has shown that manifestos have legs among domestic extremists. While this antisemitism unfortunately flourishes year-round and has been getting worse, particular attention to security is warranted on holidays because of the demonstrated penchant extremists have for openly admitting they draw inspiration from each other’s crimes.

Christmas

In the run-up to and during the holidays, ISIS supporters have historically churned out calls to action that have promoted Christmas market attacks in Germany (2016) and France (2018) as well as the 2015 attack on a county employees’ holiday party in San Bernardino, Calif. Propaganda has run the gamut from depicting jihadists next to Christmas trees, to bombs in Santa’s bag of gifts, to Santa running from an ISIS truck while lugging a flaming Christmas tree. “Beat him violently,” said one image in French depicting a dead Santa in Strasbourg, scene of the 2018 attack. “Be sure to inflict the greatest losses on the enemy.” Another suggested planting explosives in public Christmas tree displays, while yet another propaganda poster depicted blood-spattered angel lights on Regent Street in London.

These calls that circulate among ISIS channels have not always fallen on deaf ears: Everitt Aaron Jameson, a Modesto, Calif., tow-truck driver and former Marine, pleaded guilty in 2018 to planning a Christmas-season attack on San Francisco’s Pier 39; he had “liked” on Facebook an ISIS propaganda image depicting Santa with a box of dynamite in New York’s Times Square. And while the internet isn’t as saturated with calls for Christmas attacks as in ISIS’ heyday – when the terror group expressly issued many threats to the Vatican – these calls are inevitably released by ISIS supporters trying to urge others to take advantage of the symbolism of the Christian holiday. An English-language message to the “lone wolves and hungry lions” that circulated online among ISIS supporters as “new year is at the door” last December called on would-be attackers to use the holiday season and specifically target American and French civilians with a variety of tactics including arson and poisoning.

Christmas attacks have also served as a reminder that lone attackers, regardless of group loyalty or even ideology, have a well of open-source terror tutorials and advice from which to draw. The Dec. 11, 2017, bomber in the New York City subway tunnel, ISIS supporter Akayed Ullah, used an al-Qaeda pipe bomb recipe featured in the summer 2015 issue of *Inspire* magazine that incorporated a Christmas light, but the device didn’t work as intended.

New Year’s Eve

Just before the turn of the millennium, Ahmed Ressam, detained at a port of entry while trying to cross into the United States from Canada, revealed a plot to bomb Los Angeles International Airport as 1999 turned into 2000. Officials would say that terror cells had been disrupted in multiple countries as the would-be LAX bomber claimed other millennium attacks had been planned worldwide.

Areas traditionally known to be crowded with revelers on any New Year’s Eve quickly become high-security locations as authorities wisely put extra preparation and manpower into hardening these party spots, such as Times Square. And the timing doesn’t need to be as monumental as the millennium: multiple New Year’s Eve plots linked to ISIS in the last days of 2015 spurred stiff security around that year’s celebrations in Europe. The threat could also be connected to additional motivating factors; for example, personalities billed to appear at New Year’s celebrations or specific scheduled locations for

festivities could also inspire domestic extremists driven by politics, religion, or conspiracy theories to attack.

But the symbolism of New Year's to extremists, often expressed in propaganda, can make a multitude of targets – including more accessible ones with less of a police presence – attractive to a would-be attacker as the clock nears midnight. This symbolism can be considered similar to anyone who would make a New Year's resolution to start the fresh year on a high note – except to extremists that fresh slate means making their cause or ideology infamous and potentially doing it with a bang, drawing new recruits to pump up the movement's strength, and essentially claiming the new year as their own.

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HEADLINE	11/22 Taliban expands fight against Islamic State
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/11/22/taliban-isis-afghanistan/
GIST	<p>JALALABAD, Afghanistan — The Taliban has expanded its shadowy war against the Islamic State branch in Afghanistan, deploying hundreds more fighters to this eastern province in an increasingly violent fight and critical test of the group's counterterrorism abilities after the U.S. troop withdrawal.</p> <p>More than 1,300 additional Taliban fighters have been deployed to Nangahar province in the past month with orders to increase the tempo of operations, according to Taliban security officials. Taliban night raids against suspected Islamic State-Khorasan members are on the rise, and many of the hundreds arrested have disappeared or turned up dead, according to Jalalabad residents and Taliban fighters.</p> <p>“The fight is difficult, and yes sometimes it is brutal, but we have to eradicate Daesh not just for Afghanistan, but for the entire world,” said Qari Nurullah Fateh, a Taliban fighter under the group's intelligence wing in Jalalabad. Daesh is the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State commonly used in Afghanistan. “If someone doesn't surrender to us, we kill them.”</p> <p>Fateh's unit carries out multiple search operations for Islamic State suspects in Jalalabad most nights from sunset until early morning prayers. Previously, the fighters would only leave base once or twice a week. Fateh estimated that seven to 10 Islamic State suspects are arrested in Jalalabad every week and about six are killed.</p> <p>The Taliban crackdown has sent shock waves through the province and is emerging in Islamic State recruitment propaganda calling on Nangahar residents to rise up and resist. It is unclear how many new fighters have joined the Islamic State's ranks, but since the Taliban takeover the group has strengthened, become more active and expanded its presence to nearly every Afghan province, according to United Nations assessments.</p> <p>The wave of Islamic State attacks here and across Afghanistan is the first sustained challenge to the Taliban's grip on security since the group took control of the country in August. But the escalating fight in Nangahar risks overstretching limited Taliban resources and further alienating many Afghans.</p> <p>The Islamic State began attacking Jalalabad within weeks of the Taliban takeover. Local Taliban commanders initially responded by killing several accused collaborators and hanging their bodies along main roads and at busy intersections.</p> <p>“This was a very effective way to respond,” said Fateh, the Taliban fighter in Jalalabad. “It was a lesson to the people that this is what happens if you join Daesh. We wanted to show them the consequences.” Two other elite Taliban fighters confirmed Fateh's account.</p> <p>“Myself, I strung up two of the bodies,” Fateh said, estimating other Taliban fighters hung about 40 more. Dozens of accused collaborators were beheaded. He said the punishments were carried out in accordance with Islamic law and were approved by Taliban provincial leadership.</p>

But since the brutal killings, violence has only increased, according to data collected by local health officials. And some Jalalabad residents and former Afghan government officials warn that the Taliban's approach to restoring order will fan Islamic State recruitment efforts.

Community leaders in Nangahar have pleaded for the Taliban to end the killings, warning "otherwise we cannot stop our youth from joining the [Islamic State] and the beginning of a very brutal era," said Abdul Sayed, a London-based researcher of extremist organizations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, citing statements released via public WhatsApp groups.

At a recent news conference, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid downplayed the threat, saying the Islamic State does not have any support among Afghans and the group has "largely been dealt with."

But Khalil Hamraz, the spokesman for the Taliban's directorate of intelligence, acknowledged at the same conference that the Taliban's military takeover of the country inadvertently bolstered Islamic State ranks. Taliban attacks on prisons across the country freed jailed Islamic State members who now threaten security in Afghanistan, he said.

"During the victory of the Islamic Emirate, many Daesh prisoners unfortunately managed to escape," he said, but in the months since, Taliban fighters have arrested about 600 Islamic State suspects and defused deadly explosives.

Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan are estimated to number between 2,000 and 3,500 — just a fraction of the approximately 70,000 fighters in the Taliban's ranks.

The Taliban has engaged in battles with the Islamic State for years. In 2019, Taliban fighters helped clear much of Nangahar of Islamic State-held territory, in parallel with a [massive U.S.-led operation](#) in which the United States closely supported Afghan government forces with waves of airstrikes. U.S. officials said they did not partner with the Taliban but said Taliban-led offensives on the ground against the Islamic State were critical to its success.

Islamic State attacks across Afghanistan sharply declined the following year, but U.S. officials warned that the group could easily regroup if counterterrorism pressure isn't applied after the U.S. withdrawal.

Orders to kill

Even with specialized equipment and elite counterterrorism units, U.S.-backed Afghan government forces struggled for years to control Nangahar. Home to formidable terrain, profitable smuggling routes and mineral deposits close to Kabul, the province is key real estate for militant groups looking to move fighters and munitions between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

"These Taliban fighters are not familiar with the province, and they have no way to check the intelligence they receive about [Islamic State] targets," said a Jalalabad resident and former civil society activist, who, like others in this report, spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear of reprisals. "So they just go after anyone they suspect, kill them and say that person was Daesh."

He said he knows dozens of families whose homes were raided and who cannot find their loved ones. Those who are imprisoned by the Taliban and released, he said, often endured days of torture.

Fateh, the Taliban fighter assigned to the group's intelligence wing in Jalalabad, said the top Taliban intelligence commander for Nangahar, Mohammad Bashir, signs off on all targets before a raid is launched and has the final say in all sentences delivered to captured suspects.

"Dr. Bashir tells us Daesh is like a virus that will not just infect Afghanistan, but other countries." Fateh said, referring to the 45-year-old commander. "So the less dangerous people we bring to prison, but the most dangerous are the ones we have orders to kill on the spot."

Bashir declined multiple interview requests. Bilal Karimi, a deputy Taliban spokesman, would not comment on whether a Taliban court has ruled that accused Islamic State members should be hung in public or beheaded.

“However, I can say many of the [Islamic State] members have been killed in armed clashes,” he said. Most suspects detained for trial are brought to Jalalabad’s intelligence compound, Fateh said. If they are sentenced to death, they are executed and their bodies are dumped in the street outside the building, he said. In other cases, accused Islamic State members are walked into an open field on Jalalabad’s outskirts and shot.

“We always inform the neighborhood elder so they can tell the family where to collect the body for burial,” he said. “We never desecrate the dead. That is wrong. It’s against Islam.”

Violence spikes

Muhammad Tahir Mubaris, who commands a Taliban unit that was recently moved from Ghazni to Jalalabad, said extensive networks of Taliban informants will ultimately help the group achieve what the United States couldn’t: the complete defeat the Islamic State in Afghanistan.

“It’s because the people trust us. Daesh has no support here,” he said, leading a patrol convoy through central Jalalabad traffic on a recent day this month. Unlike the United States, he said, Taliban raids don’t alienate local populations.

“We saw how the Americans conducted night raids. It showed us the wrong way to fight,” he said, referring to U.S.-backed operations that drew criticism from human rights groups. “We don’t just break into a house and destroy everything. This is our country; we respect the culture.”

The approach does not appear to be working. While the Taliban’s military takeover ended decades of war for most of Afghanistan, violence in Nangahar has escalated with near-daily attacks claimed by the Islamic State. And some Jalalabad residents describe the Taliban raids as more brutal than those carried out by the United States and its Afghan allies.

Few Taliban fighters are trained or have experience conducting precision operations in urban areas. After more than two decades of fighting a guerrilla war, the force is still adjusting to maintaining security during peacetime. Exponentially increasing the number of operations without also expanding intelligence capabilities raises the risk that civilians will be mistaken for Islamic State members.

Already, the number of civilians caught in the crossfire has surged in Nangahar. Across the province, twice as many people were killed and injured by roadside bombs, clashes and targeted killings compared to the month before the government fell, according to a senior member of the provincial health department. And in Jalalabad, the central hospital admitted more casualties of war in October than any other month this year, according to two senior doctors there.

“I can’t remember the last time the numbers of war wounded were this high,” said one of the doctors at Jalalabad’s main hospital who has worked in the city’s health sector for years.

Outside his office, the courtyard was full of dozens of families and groups of Taliban members waiting for news of relatives and comrades inside.

Thick metal pins poked out of a white gauze wrapping around Gulzada Osman’s right leg. This month he was knocked off his feet and sprayed with shrapnel after a passing Taliban pickup truck rolled over a roadside bomb not far from his home.

Taliban fighters responded with gunfire, he said. After suffering only minor injuries from the blast, Osman was then shot through his thigh. “My leg felt like it was burning, but when I looked down I just saw blood everywhere,” he said.

	<p>The explosive was probably placed by an Islamic State fighter or by someone paid by the group to target the Taliban, according to former local officials and analysts. Unlike recent bombings claimed by the militants elsewhere in Afghanistan, in Nangahar, Islamic State attacks are smaller in scale: roadside bombs targeting Taliban convoys and drive-by shootings of Taliban fighters stationed at checkpoints.</p> <p>Islamic State attacks are expected to rise as the Taliban ramps up operations in Nangahar, according to the former Afghan security officials.</p> <p>“The people are more than upset,” said one of the former officials of rising violence and civilian casualties. “Before the government collapse many thought the Taliban could be a better way. But if the fight continues like this, there will be a wave of people joining Daesh.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 US to drop Colombia FARC off terror list
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-remove-colombian-rebel-group-farc-from-terrorist-list-in-support-of-five-year-old-peace-pact-11637688001?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>The Biden administration will remove a former Colombian rebel group from a list of foreign terrorist organizations, a measure intended to demonstrate American support for a fragile peace agreement with the guerrillas in Colombia, said U.S. and congressional officials with knowledge of the coming announcement.</p> <p>The officials said the move could come no later than Nov. 30, coinciding with the five-year anniversary of the historic peace accord between then-President Juan Manuel Santos and rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. Negotiated with U.S. support, the agreement ended a 52-year-conflict and resulted in Mr. Santos winning the Nobel Peace Prize.</p> <p>The FARC began to demobilize shortly after the signing, with 13,000 men and women laying down their arms.</p> <p>Colombian officials who spent four years negotiating with the FARC had been quietly pressing U.S. officials to drop the terrorist designation against the group. By doing that, the U.S. recognizes the steps rebels took to transform their group into a political party, now called the Common People party, officials said.</p> <p>“For the Biden administration, this is a low-cost thing to do,” said Sergio Jaramillo, the Santos administration’s architect of the peace talks, which took place in Cuba. “It sends the signal to the FARC, ‘it is been five years, you’ve done your bit, behaved properly, and we’re delisting you.’ ”</p> <p>The administration also intends to place militant groups made up of former FARC rebels on the list of terrorist organizations, including the New Marquetalia group, which is led by a former FARC commander who broke from the peace pact and operates along the border with Venezuela, and a second group of ex-rebels that continues to use the FARC name, the officials said.</p> <p>In the years since the peace pact, thousands of former FARC members have begun small-scale rural farming projects, and a handful of former rebel commanders were given posts in Colombia’s congress. The former guerrillas are also participating in a special judicial system investigating the myriad crimes committed by combatants.</p> <p>By dropping the group’s terrorist designation, the U.S. can fund programs in Colombia in which former rebels participate, such as replacing crops used to make cocaine with legal products.</p> <p>One of the former top commanders of the defunct FARC, Julian Gallo, now a senator, was surprised when told about the developments in Washington.</p>

“We don’t know about it but if it’s true we thank the Biden administration for its decision,” Mr. Gallo said. The administration of Colombian President Iván Duque didn’t respond to a call seeking comment.

Guerrilla commanders asked to be taken off the terrorist list in 2015, when the talks between the Santos administration and the rebels were in their third year. U.S. officials said they would consider the request upon a peace process taking hold, said Bernard Aronson, a former U.S. envoy in the peace talks.

Mr. Aronson said dropping the designation for groups such as the FARC when they make good on pledges during peace talks sends a global message to other violent groups the U.S. opposes.

“If groups that were once violent revolutionary groups are never allowed to get off the list, that’s one less incentive for them to make peace,” said Mr. Aronson. “You undermine incentives for other groups to renounce terrorism, renounce violent struggle.”

Founded in 1964, the FARC was responsible for attacks on towns, summary executions and the kidnappings of thousands of people, including Americans, most notably three U.S. contractors who spent five years in captivity until [they were freed in 2008](#). The U.S. added the group to the State Department’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations in 1997, when the FARC was reaching its apex of power.

The designation has restricted the U.S. from funding programs aimed at advancing the peace accords if the rebels were involved, leaving it unable to support efforts to destroy land mines, programs in which the FARC has played an essential role.

“They’re the people who put the land mines there and are best able to tell us where to find them,” said Tim Rieser, a senior aide to Sen. Patrick Leahy (D., Vt.) who works on Colombia policy.

There are many critics of the former rebels, including victims of war who assert they haven’t admitted to all their crimes or provided reparations. In the U.S., Rep. María Elvira Salazar, a Florida Republican who represents a region with Colombian immigrants, wrote on Twitter that by taking the FARC off the list, “the Biden White House is signaling that FARC is not so evil.”

Though thousands of fighters [disarmed under the peace pact](#), enrolling in school and working on small farms, they are tainted by association with several hundred rebels who didn’t participate in the peace process. Those guerrillas either formed or joined drug-trafficking gangs, which they continue to call FARC, though their goal isn’t to topple the state.

The State Department has previously said that it is reviewing the FARC’s designation, and all designations are subject to review every five years.

The White House referred questions on this topic to the State Department.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said Tuesday that the department has notified Congress of forthcoming actions regarding FARC.

The Biden administration is “fully committed to working with our Colombian partners on the implementation of the peace accord,” he said.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Sri Lanka trial: 2019 Easter bombings
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/23/trial-begins-of-25-men-over-sri-lanka-easter-bombings-in-2019
GIST	The trial has begun of the 25 men accused of masterminding the 2019 Easter bombings in Sri Lanka , which killed almost 300 people when churches and luxury hotels were targeted by Islamic terrorist suicide bombers.

The lengthy process to reach trial after more than two years has been heavily criticised by families of those killed and the Christian church in Sri Lanka, who have accused the government of failing to take proper action against those responsible.

The suspects are facing over 23,000 charges in total, including conspiracy to murder, aiding and abetting the attacks, and collecting arms and ammunition.

Lawyers involved in the trial in the capital, Colombo, warned that the sheer scale of charges, and the thousands of witnesses listed in the case, could mean it drags on for up to a decade. The case will be heard before a special panel of judges.

All eight of the suicide bombers who carried out the Easter Sunday attacks on the three five-star hotels in Colombo and three Christian churches died in the blasts. However, their associates and relatives stand accused of being involved in planning and masterminding the terrorist attacks, the worst in Sri Lanka's recent history.

They include YM Ibrahim, the father of two of the suicide bombers, Inshaf and Ilham Ibrahim, who targeted two hotels in Colombo and Mohammad Naufer, a Sri Lankan national accused of affiliation with Islamic State and masterminding the attacks.

Several other members of National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ), a home-grown extremist Islamic group believed to be behind the bombings, are also among the 25 standing trial.

The attacks, which took place on 21 April 2019, killed 269 people, including 45 foreign nationals. In the aftermath of the attacks, a state of emergency was imposed on the country for four months and hundreds of Muslims have since been arrested, including a Muslim member of parliament. However, in recent months senior members of the church accused the police and the government of dragging their feet over bringing the case to trial.

A press statement released by the archdiocese of Colombo in August said: "It is clear from this procedure that after such a long time the government has no interest in finding out the truth about the attack and they are going to cover it up and wash their hands."

They accused the government, led by strongman president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, of capitalising on the Easter attacks to come to power at the end of 2019 on a mandate of security for Sri Lanka, but failing to live up to their promises.

The head of the Catholic church in Sri Lanka, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith said last week that the families of victims were struggling to move on while they felt that justice had not been served. "We are not here to take revenge upon anyone, nor have we called for anyone's blood. But we need justice," he said. On Sunday, members of the Catholic community held large demonstrations pushing for faster action.

Members of the Catholic community allege they are now being harassed for their actions demanding justice. Fr Cyril Gamini, director of the National Catholic Centre for Social Communications who has accused the authorities of complicity with the attackers, was recently subjected to three days of questioning by Sri Lanka's central intelligence department.

The trial is one of three that will be held in connection with the attacks. On Monday, the trial began for several senior officials accused of criminal negligence for failing to act on intelligence information that could have prevented the bombings.

Sri Lanka's former police chief Pujith Jayasundera and former defence secretary Hemasiri Fernando are among those who will stand trial, with Jayasundera alone facing a total of 855 charges.

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SOURCE	https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/22/bahrain-foils-planned-attack-accuses-iran
GIST	<p>Bahrain security forces have arrested a number of suspects, and confiscated weapons and explosives ahead of a planned attack, the interior ministry said.</p> <p>The ministry did not say how many people were arrested or specify their nationalities.</p> <p>“Terrorists (were) arrested for plotting terrorist operations against security and civil peace,” the interior ministry wrote on Twitter on Monday.</p> <p>It described them as “linked with terrorist groups in Iran”.</p> <p>Bahrain, host to the United States Navy’s Fifth Fleet and other international naval operations, has often accused Shia Muslim Iran of seeking to destabilise the Sunni-ruled kingdom, which has a Shia majority population. Iran has denied such allegations.</p> <p>The island state was the only Gulf Arab state to witness a sizeable pro-democracy uprising in the 2011 Arab Spring, from a largely Shia opposition movement, which it quashed with help from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.</p> <p>Opposition movements have been outlawed and hundreds of dissidents have been imprisoned – with many stripped of their nationality.</p> <p>Human rights groups have frequently said cases against activists in Bahrain – men and women, religious and secular – fail to meet the basic standards of fair trials.</p> <p>Bahrain’s authorities have repeatedly rejected the accusations.</p> <p>Last year, Bahrain said it had foiled a “terrorist attack” backed by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	11/23 Narcan vending machines central, east WA
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/health/narcan-vending-machines-available-central-eastern-washington/293-967b33c1-e9fc-444d-a904-a8cd1d6d65c3
GIST	<p>MOSES LAKE, Wash — It's a simple idea that could save a life.</p> <p>Vending machines giving out Narcan Nasal Sprays were recently installed in Moses Lake and Wenatchee with the aim of getting Narcan to those who might need in a time of crisis.</p> <p>The machines are part of a project for the Central Washington Recovery Coalition and the North Central Accountable Community of Health (NCACH).</p> <p>“It was really innovative idea. We didn't know if it was possible,” said Joseph Hunter about the vending machine idea. Hunter works as the NCACH recovery coach network manager.</p> <p>The nasal spray reverses the effects of an opioid overdose and keeps it from turning fatal. Yet instead of getting Narcan from a doctor or from police, some communities can now get it from a vending machine.</p> <p>“We came up with that idea because we were distributing them by hand and it was taking a lot of time.”</p>

	<p>According to Hunter, since the start of the pandemic overdoses have increased due to isolation and the shutdown of services and resources.</p> <p>With funding from Beacon Health Options, there are now two Narcan vending machines in central and eastern Washington. One at Wenatchee's Alano Club and the other at the Open Doors Sleep Center in Moses Lake.</p> <p>Hunter said they wanted these machines to have very few barriers with no paperwork necessary and no cash required: "So people that struggle or know somebody that's struggling has a safe place they can walk in and get Narcan without any questions and without labeling themselves as somebody in active addiction."</p> <p>One of the biggest barriers to getting Narcan to people dealing with addiction, according to Hunter, can be the stigma, which is something he's very familiar with.</p> <p>"They're not going to go into their family doctor and ask for Narcan. They're not going to go to a pharmacy and buy it. I know from my own experience that the last thing I ever wanted to do was tell my family doctor that I was struggling with opiate addiction."</p> <p>The group also plans to install a third Narcan vending machine in Omak at the Family Health Center. That machine is currently in the process of being built and is expected to be put in early next year.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Coin shortage creates two-bit black market
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/quarter-shortage-creates-a-two-bit-black-market-in-coin-operated-seattle/
GIST	<p>Seattle may style itself the capital of the information economy, but the "bits" that matter most to locals like Heidi Thorsen are the quarters she and her customers have had to scrounge for since the pandemic struck.</p> <p>In the Before Times, Thorsen's Lunar Laundry, a coin-only laundromat in Ballard, was what's known as "quarter positive": Customers brought in so many of their own coins that Thorsen made twice monthly coin deposits at her bank.</p> <p>But soon after pandemic restrictions hit last year, Thorsen noticed customers relying more often on her change machine. Then noncustomers — apartment tenants and even some small-business owners — began coming in and surreptitiously draining her change machine.</p> <p>As Lunar went quarter negative, Thorsen went to her bank to replenish her coin supply. But the bank was so short on change, she could only buy a few \$10, 40-quarter rolls, and most often there were none at all.</p> <p>"Where the heck are they going?" says Thorsen, who now spends considerable time moving her shrinking supply of quarters from her washers and dryers back to her change machine. "It's not like they disappeared."</p> <p>Thorsen speaks for many in the local coin-operated economy, a diverse, somewhat old-school community of businesses and consumers that has been in a state of agitation since COVID-19 interrupted the normal cycle of coins.</p> <p>"It's something I have to think about all the time," says Queen Anne resident Dan White, whose apartment has a coin-operated laundry. Early in the pandemic, White had to frantically group-text friends to secure enough quarters for a weekend's wash.</p> <p>Another time, after White scored a precious stack from the change machine in a downtown bar, he was followed out and lectured by an employee. "He was like, 'I'll let it slide this time but you can never do that again,'" White says.</p>

White is more systematic these days, periodically hitting a handful of businesses to get his rolls for the month. But the routine is time-consuming, with a furtiveness that often feels “weirdly like I was doing like a drug deal or something,” he says. “People that aren’t using quarters for a laundry machine have no idea that this is even happening.”

Indeed, the Great Quarter Shortage has exposed another social and economic divide as a subset of consumers and businesses must scramble to replace what COVID has made scarce. The result is a kind of two-bit black market, rife with clever workarounds and conspiracy theories, and no small amount of social friction.

“It’s really difficult,” says Denise Eam, owner of PT Laundry in Kent, about having to ask noncustomers not to use her change machine. “Sometimes people are really nice and say ‘sorry’ [but] some of them are so nasty.”

“They’re worth more than 25 cents right now, that’s for sure,” adds Alex Singleterry. He runs a network of 83 arcade games at his Ballard tavern, the Ice Box Arcade, and elsewhere in the Seattle area and loses so many quarters to noncustomers that he routinely has to send out an employee to search for more. “We had to go to three banks today to get stocked up on coins for the weekend,” he said Friday.

Small, expensive change

Technically, there is no quarter shortage, in Seattle or anywhere. The U.S. Mint produced nearly 24% more coins in 2020 than in 2019, despite a temporary pandemic slowdown, and continues to roll them out at “near record levels,” according to Mint officials.

The problem, federal officials say, is many of the roughly 55 billion quarters estimated to be in circulation have been stranded by the pandemic in places — under your couch cushions, say, or in your console coin holder — where the coin-operated economy can’t touch them. It’s a smaller, less visible version of the supply chain crisis, but with quarters instead of cargo containers.

Early in the pandemic, many consumers and businesses stopped using physical currency out of safety concerns. Overall cash purchases in 2020 dropped nearly 27% compared with 2019, while the rate at which coins and bills change hands fell more than 70% — the steepest drop on record — and hasn’t recovered, Federal Reserve data show.

As coins accumulated in homes and handbags, retailers that were typically quarter-negative even before COVID went even further in the red and made even more frequent coin purchases from banks.

Consumers, meanwhile, were also less frequently hauling in their caches of spare change to banks or coin kiosks.

As the circulation of coins slowed, and as the reopening economy led banks to order more coins from the Federal Reserve, the country’s central bank saw its own coin inventory fall below normal levels. In June 2020, the Reserve imposed a “temporary” restriction on coin orders by private banks that, despite a brief reprieve this year, remains in effect. Some banks restricted their own coin sales, even to big retail customers — and many still do.

The bank is “shorting us on our order a lot,” says Dave Garcia, assistant store director at Ballard Market, which, like many retailers, has suspended its own quarter sales to consumers.

Brandon Whitehead, another Seattle apartment dweller plagued by a coin-operated laundry, says his bank rarely has quarters now and local retailers are either out or limit sales to a few dollars worth. “So that’s enough for, like, one load of wash.”

The scarcity is more than just an inconvenience, government and industry officials say. It can mean real hardship for lower-income people, who may lack access to debit cards or other digital payment systems.

Likewise for small-business owners who depend on those “unbanked” customers, and who themselves can’t afford to upgrade to digital payments and the touchless economy.

Often, these pain points intersect at laundromats.

More than half of U.S. self-service laundromats are still coin-only, and their customer base is more likely to be “unbanked and underbanked” than “just about any other business you might think of,” says Brian Wallace, president and CEO of the Coin Laundry Association.

“Get Coin Moving”

Solving the quarter crisis has become a top priority of the Federal Reserve, where a specially empaneled U.S. Coin Task Force is working to persuade Americans to spend those quarters and other coins back into circulation.

Yet despite an exceedingly earnest “Get Coin Moving” campaign, with public service announcements, a social media hashtag and a YouTube video, the task force reckons that a too-large chunk of the \$48.5 billion worth of coins in circulation is still “sitting dormant inside America’s 128 million households.”

Out on the streets of the coin-operated world, that imbalance has manifested as a kind of coinage roller coaster, with jubilant periods when banks and stores seemingly have rolls aplenty, followed by renewed tightening and anxiety.

At a Seattle Safeway, a clerk said the store typically had only five rolls to sell a day and recommended coming in the morning. A clerk at a Seattle Fred Meyer said the shortage was “not a thing anymore” but declined to sell this reporter more than one roll.

As with much of the pandemic, the coin drought has produced its own internal narrative, complete with conspiracy theories. One theory in circulation is that government was prolonging the shortage to encourage a shift to digital payments so “they can track all the data and know exactly what you’re buying,” the Ice Box’s Singleterry says.

A laundromat worker speculated that coin kiosk company executives were hoarding supplies so they could search them for rare coins.

But the long coin drought has also generated extraordinary innovation and adaptation, especially as coin-operated businesses and their customers resign themselves to a situation that could last at least as long as the pandemic.

Some quarter-dependent consumers have mapped out which banks have extra rolls, or which grocery store managers will cut loose a few rolls at closing time.

Quarter-negative businesses, meanwhile, often have nurtured alliances with coin-positive peers, such as carwashes and vending machine operators. Wallace, the laundry association president, says some business owners have exploited the shortage’s regional differences by driving hours away to buy quarters from colleagues.

Thorsen, after months of desperation, struck a deal to buy coins from a local quarter-positive business owner whose identity she guards like a trade secret. She’s also going partly digital with a new Bluetooth-based system that lets customers scan a QR code on a washer or dryer and pay through their phones.

No need to “knock heads”

For now, some coin-only businesses are taking defensive measures. Many post “customers only” signs on their change machines. Others have set their change machines to reject \$20 bills or now fill them only partly to minimize losses from a big-spending noncustomer. Wallace has even seen laundromats install a kill switch so if noncustomers try “to make change, they just cut the power to the machine.”

	<p>The defensive measures have resulted in unpleasant interactions on occasion, but also new forms of decorum.</p> <p>Early in the pandemic, preventing noncustomers from using the change machine could get “confrontational at times,” says Melissa Delaney, a laundry attendant at Crystal Clean in Capitol Hill. But eventually, Delaney says, she and her noncustomers settled into a more graceful routine: They would claim to be doing their laundry there before walking out, which meant “I could do my job and they could get what they needed, and we didn’t have to sit there and knock heads,” Delaney says.</p> <p>Thorsen and Singleterry have also tried to stay low-key and humane about noncustomers who come for their coins.</p> <p>The coin shortage “is bigger than a couple of business owners” buying her quarters, says Thorsen.</p> <p>“It’s a pain in the butt, but it’s not a big deal,” Singleterry adds. With the enormous number of coins running through his machines — around 40,000 at any given time — losing a few more to noncustomers is far from his biggest pandemic challenge.</p> <p>“And at the end of the day,” he says, “our job is to turn quarters into dollars and put dollars in the bank.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 After 4yrs as pawn, Seattle man is home
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/after-4-years-as-pawn-in-u-s-china-game-seattle-man-is-home/
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS (AP) — Daniel Hsu, a U.S. citizen, fought for four years to escape China.</p> <p>The Seattle resident was barred from leaving despite having committed no crime, a pawn in a geopolitical game between two giant superpowers.</p> <p>Then earlier this month, just four days before a virtual meeting between President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, Hsu was told to prepare to go home. He had less than 48 hours.</p> <p>“It was a total rush,” he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from his home in Seattle.</p> <p>As he raced to visit his grandmother, pack his things and travel to Guangzhou, Hsu knew nothing of the horse-trading going on between China and the U.S. in the build-up to the three-plus hour video meeting between Biden and Xi on Nov. 15.</p> <p>Both countries appeared to be trying to dial back tensions in their increasingly fractious relationship, and Hsu had become a bargaining chip. He could return to Seattle, and seven Chinese nationals who were convicted of crimes in the U.S. would be sent back to China.</p> <p>China’s ability to make deals by effectively taking people like Hsu hostage has raised concerns that Beijing may feel emboldened to double down on the practice, which has angered not only the U.S. but also Canada, Australia and a number of European countries who say their citizens have also faced arbitrary detention in China.</p> <p>“There’s no deterrent imposed on Beijing to doing it again,” said Sophie Richardson, China Director at Human Rights Watch. “The problem is if you took the truly principled road, a lot of people would still be sitting in arbitrary detention in China.”</p> <p>A U.S. official who was knowledgeable about the administration’s talks with Beijing regarding Hsu told AP that Hsu was not a “deliverable” for the Biden-Xi meeting and that what looked to some like a prisoner exchange was not actually a prisoner exchange, but rather the product of long – and continuing – efforts to get Beijing to live up to its international obligations. The official wasn’t authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.</p>

“The PRC should never have subjected U.S. citizens to coercive exit bans. The PRC had been failing to meet its international obligations to take back their nationals who have been ordered removed,” the official said, using the acronym for the People’s Republic of China. “There are additional Americans subject to exit bans and arbitrary detentions in the PRC, and we will continue to work to secure their release.”

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said he wasn’t clear on the details of Hsu’s case, but that China handled such matters according to established rules.

“I would like to emphasize that all are equal under the law and the relevant Chinese organs handle such matters in accordance with the law and regulations,” Zhao said at a daily briefing on Wednesday. “In the carrying out of such duties, there is no tolerance for interference, slander or distortion.”

Hsu told the AP that he was effectively held hostage by Chinese authorities seeking to convince his father to return to China and face justice for allegedly embezzling roughly \$63,000 over 20 years ago, when he was chairman of a government real estate company. Hsu’s father has said he is innocent and the target of a political vendetta.

From August 2017 until February 2018, Hsu was held in solitary confinement in Hefei, the capital of Anhui province. The walls in his beige room were covered in rubber, Hsu told the AP in a 2020 interview. The table was wrapped in soft, gray leather. White blinds covered two barred windows. There were no sharp edges.

Five surveillance cameras recorded his movements, and two guards kept constant, silent watch. They followed Hsu to the shower and stood beside him at the toilet.

Lights blazed through the night. If he rolled over on his mattress, guards woke him and made him turn his face toward a surveillance camera that recorded him as he slept.

When he was released from the so-called education center, he was subject to an exit ban and barred from leaving China. Under Chinese law, authorities have broad discretion to block both Chinese citizens and foreign nationals from leaving the country. The U.S., Canada, Australia and the U.K. have issued advisories warning their citizens they can be prevented from leaving China arbitrarily, even over disputes they may not be directly involved in.

Hsu’s is not the first case of hostage diplomacy involving China.

In September, an agreement was reached to allow Meng Wanzhou, a senior executive at Chinese technology giant Huawei, to return home from Canada after a three-year diplomatic standoff. Meng had faced a U.S. extradition request on charges of fraud for allegedly misrepresenting the company’s business dealings with Iran.

Within hours of Meng’s release, Beijing freed two Canadians who had been detained in China on national security charges shortly after Meng’s arrest in Canada. China’s Foreign Ministry said at the time the Canadians were released for health reasons and downplayed any connection with Meng’s case. Canada has long maintained that the men are innocent.

The next day, two American siblings who — like Hsu — had been blocked from leaving China for years in an apparent effort to coerce their father to return to China, returned to the United States.

Hsu’s luck didn’t change until the weeks leading up to the November video conference. Hsu said he got a call from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing four days before Xi and Biden spoke, on the afternoon of Thursday, Nov. 11. He was instructed to get to Guangzhou, a southern Chinese megacity about 900 miles from his apartment in Shanghai, in time for a charter flight home early that Sunday morning.

He went to see his 103-year-old grandmother, who lives in Shanghai. She cried when he told her he was leaving. “I could tell she was wondering if she’d see me again,” he said.

Hsu had never told her about his exit ban because he worried for her health. He never told her about his six months in solitary confinement. Or the fact that his wife – also innocent of any crime – had also been blocked from leaving China until last year, for reasons that were never clear to them. As a consequence, their teenage daughter was effectively orphaned for nearly three years, living on her own in their big, empty house in Seattle.

Sunday morning, Nov. 14, dawned in Guangzhou with a rare and glorious blue sky, and the sunshine seemed to match Hsu’s mood. At the airport, he walked across the tarmac toward a waiting Gulfstream 5 jet – the plane that would finally carry him home.

Hsu said he saw seven people disembark, though he didn’t know who they were.

Only one of them — Xu Guojun, a former Chinese bank executive, now bald and wearing baggy camouflage pants — was in handcuffs. A pair of police clad in hooded white hazmat suits, with goggles, facemasks, blue gloves and blue booties escorted him off the plane.

Xu had fled China in 2001 after being accused of embezzling hundreds of millions of dollars. China’s Central Commission for Discipline Inspection put out a statement trumpeting Xu’s return to the motherland as a “major achievement” in China’s global anti-corruption fight, which has intensified under Xi Jinping.

A federal court in Las Vegas sentenced the former Bank of China manager on conspiracy charges in 2009 and ordered him and his co-conspirators to pay \$482 million in restitution. He spent nearly 13 years in U.S. prison, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

Two of the other returnees – Zhang Yujing and Lu Jing – tried to enter Mar-a-Lago in 2019. Zhang was sentenced to eight months for trespassing and lying to federal agents, while Lu was sentenced to 59 days for resisting arrest, according to DHS. Two others – Wang Yuhao and Zhang Jielun – were convicted of illegally photographing a naval air station in Key West, Fla., in 2020. The final pair – Sun Yong and Tang Junliang – had been convicted of financial crimes in Utah, according to DHS and Justice Department records.

And then it was Hsu’s turn. He walked up ten boarding stairs onto the plane. He had a single suitcase and one carry on.

“I felt like I was already on U.S. soil. That was really a relief,” Hsu said. “I took a deep breath when I sat down in my chair.”

He said he spent the six-hour flight from Guangzhou to Guam reading “Dune” in Mandarin, playing video games and chatting with a half dozen Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers also on the plane. Then there was a three-hour layover in Guam and a seven-hour flight to Honolulu. He said he spent the 24-hour layover in Hawaii basically sleeping in his hotel room, then it was back on the jet for a five-and-a-half-hour flight to Phoenix.

In Phoenix, he switched to a commercial flight, which was delayed by nearly three hours. As Biden and Xi spoke of Taiwan, trade, climate change and the mutual need to avoid conflict, Hsu paced the Phoenix airport, exhausted and aimless. “I tried to read a book or read something on my phone, I just can’t,” Hsu said. “I couldn’t focus on anything. I couldn’t wait to see my wife.”

Finally, at nearly 10 p.m. local time, Hsu touched down at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. A representative from the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs was waiting for him. So was his wife, Jodie Chen.

	<p>“I just held her and gave her a hug,” Hsu said. “A very big one, very tight.”</p> <p>“Welcome home,” Chen said.</p> <p>Thanksgiving this year promises to be a massive improvement on the holiday four years ago, which Hsu said he celebrated in solitary confinement in Hefei. He said he managed to convince his minders there to bring him a special meal of Kentucky Fried Chicken.</p> <p>Hsu said he is grateful to everyone who worked behind the scenes to bring him home. He said he is happy to be in a free country but thinks often about his relatives. “I hope all is well with my family in China,” he said.</p> <p>His final departure was so sudden, Hsu said he hasn’t had time to think about what comes next, beyond trying to recapture time with his family and get back to the life and the freedom that he lost.</p> <p>“I’m tired. Just tired,” he said. “I haven’t seen my parents for four years. I haven’t seen my wife for a year and a half. We have a lot of things to talk about.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/25 Dollar Tree: items will now cost \$1.25
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/23/dollar-tree-says-items-will-now-cost-125/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK — Faced with the rising cost of goods and freight, discount retail chain Dollar Tree said Tuesday it will be raising its prices to \$1.25 for the majority of its products.</p> <p>Dollar Tree said the reason for raising its prices to \$1.25 was not due to “short-term or transitory market conditions” and said the price increases were permanent. The higher prices will also allow the company to cope with high merchandise cost increases as well as higher operating costs, such as wages, it said.</p> <p>“(Dollar Tree) believes this is the appropriate time to shift away from the constraints of the \$1.00 price point in order to continue offering extreme value to customers,” the company said in a statement.</p> <p>Dollar Tree was one of the last true “dollar stores” after most of its competition had moved away from that price point.</p> <p>The company, which is based in Chesapeake, Virginia, said in September it was testing the higher prices at select stores. On Tuesday, it said it will introduce the new price point in more than 2,000 additional Dollar Tree stores in December and complete the rollout to all its stores by early next year. The company has about 8,000 Dollar Tree stores.</p> <p>CEO Michael Witynski said he expects the Dollar Tree customers to remain loyal.</p> <p>Its shoppers “believe that at \$1.25, it’s still going to be an undeniable value because of what they’re seeing out in the marketplace,” Witynski said on a call with industry analysts. “And they know that Dollar Tree hasn’t raised its price in 35 years, so they’re giving us credit.”</p> <p>The company’s stock rose 9.2% on Tuesday following the announcement, which was paired with the company’s quarterly earnings. Analysts at Citigroup called the earnings “disappointing” but said investors are looking past earnings to the company finally raising prices.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 DOD probe: unidentified aerial phenomena
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/24/us/politics/pentagon-ufos.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Pentagon on Tuesday night announced a new group to investigate reports of unidentified aerial phenomena in sensitive areas, work that will be overseen by both the military and the intelligence agencies.</p>

The group will lead an effort to “detect, identify and attribute objects” in restricted airspace, as well as mitigate any threats to military flights.

The announcement follows the release of a [report](#) in June that [failed to provide explanations](#) of 143 sightings of strange phenomena by military pilots and others over the past two decades.

The report frustrated some inside the intelligence community who believed more analysis and research should have been done to try to categorize and explain the phenomena. Releasing a report that said the sightings were unexplained further drove theories that the videos or pictures could be visitors from space, a theory that few in the U.S. government take seriously.

Kathleen H. Hicks, the deputy defense secretary, said the new group would be called the Airborne Object Identification and Management Synchronization Group. It will be overseen by an executive council made up of the under secretary of defense for intelligence, the director of the Joint Staff and senior officials from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

The group will focus on special-use airspace, which includes military operations areas, firing ranges and places restricted for national security and other uses. In a memo, Dr. Hicks said unidentified aerial phenomena in special-use areas represented a potential safety issue for military pilots and raised “potential national security concerns.”

In June, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a report that reviewed unidentified aerial phenomena seen since 2004, noting that 143 remained unexplained. Of those, 21 reports, involving 18 episodes, possibly demonstrated technological know-how unknown to the United States, such as objects moving without observable propulsion or with rapid acceleration that is believed to be beyond the capabilities of Russia, China or other terrestrial nations.

Government officials said privately that there was no evidence of Russian or Chinese advance technology in use, much less space-traveling aliens, in the information collected. But the officials acknowledged that the government’s failure to provide much explanation would fuel a wide range of theories, some more conspiratorial than others.

While the [unexplained sightings](#) were mostly around military installations or operations, the report said that could be the result of collection bias or the presence of cutting-edge sensors.

Some people believe any phenomenon exhibiting technology beyond the abilities of the United States needs deep study. Skeptics believe most or all of the sightings, including videos recorded by cameras on military fighter jets, can be explained by tricks of optics or naturally occurring phenomena.

But the military research that underpinned the intelligence report did little to address those theories or provide specific explanations for various sightings that have captured the public’s imagination.

For years a military intelligence official, Luis Elizondo, ran a little-noticed group within the Pentagon called the [Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program](#). The Pentagon has said the program was shut down in 2012, but backers of the program said its work continued. In 2020, the Pentagon announced it had a new group, the Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon Task Force.

The memo released by Dr. Hicks said the task force would immediately transition to the new synchronization group. The oversight council will choose an acting director for the new group and issue guidance, subject to Dr. Hicks’s approval, she said.

The new director will have the power to standardize incident reporting of unidentified aerial phenomena, ask to oversee the analysis of data on the unexplained sightings and identify shortfalls in detection capabilities.

HEADLINE	11/23 Greenland loses more ice than gained
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2021/11/23/greenland-ice-melt-2021-recap/
GIST	<p>Greenland had a quite a year. For the first time in its history, rain fell at its summit. In August, it experienced one of the latest-occurring melt events in recent memory. This also became the third year with major melting events in the past decade.</p> <p>By the end of the melt season, the ice sheet lost more ice than it gained — for the 25th year in a row.</p> <p>“The long-term past two decades have shown us the incredible wrongness in calling ‘glacial pace’ something slow,” said Marco Tedesco, a research professor at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University.</p> <p>Greenland lost a net total of 166 gigatons of ice from September 2020 through August 2021. Overall, this loss is on par with recent decades — but how it arrived at that final number is not.</p> <p>“2020/21 was a comparably ‘normal’ year. The new normal, that is,” wrote Martin Stendel, a polar researcher at the Danish Meteorological Institute, in an email. “But that does not mean it was good in this sense.”</p> <p>The island experienced anomalous swings from intense melting to unusual snowfall from a former hurricane. While the annual snowfall accumulation was healthy, ice loss from iceberg calving and ocean melt was the highest since at least satellite records began in 1986.</p> <p>“When we see instability like this, this switch from a lot of accumulation to a lot of melting to a lot of accumulation to a lot of melting, it’s really a signal of the system that is looking for a way to be stable again,” said Tedesco, who also serves as an adjunct scientist at the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies. “The message of instability that Greenland is sending is terrible.”</p> <p>This year’s activity over Greenland has many researchers concerned for a not-too-distant future.</p> <p>A balancing act</p> <p>Scientists calculate Greenland’s total mass losses and gains by accounting for several factors. For one, they look at the net accumulation of snow on the ice sheet’s surface, known as surface mass balance, from when the first snowflakes fall (typically September) through the end of the melt season (the following August).</p> <p>Winter snowfall was close to average this year, according to a summary by Stendel and his colleagues. Then in late June, a near-record amount of snow fell. Not only did the snow add mass to the ice sheet, but it also helped reflect sunlight back into the atmosphere and helped delay the first melt of summer.</p> <p>But starting in July, Greenland experienced three notable melting events. Researchers reported that one episode triggered an impressive loss of eight to 12 gigatons per day. Another episode in August also caused widespread melting, but it was perhaps more noteworthy because it occurred unusually late in the melt season while rain fell on the ice sheet’s summit for the first time on record.</p> <p>Overall, the ice sheet managed to gain 396 gigatons of mass due to snow from September 2020 to August 2021 — average for recent decades, although still significantly lower than in the 1990s.</p> <p>However, mass increases from snow on the ice sheet’s surface are only part of the story.</p> <p>During the year, a large portion of ice is lost through the calving, or breaking off, of icebergs. Ice is also lost from relatively warmer seawater coming into contact and melting glacier tongues. (A much smaller proportion of ice is also lost through “basal melting,” which accounts for the heat flux from under the ice sheet as ice slides over the ground.)</p>

This year, scientists calculated that around 500 gigatons were lost from iceberg calving and ocean melt — the highest in 35 years of satellite records.

Notably, the Jakobshavn Glacier (also known as the Ilulissat glacier) on West Greenland, the world's fastest-moving glacier, shed about 45 gigatons in the past year — particularly alarming considering it was growing recently. This calving accounts for about 10 percent of the total calving and ocean melt loss this year.

“The warmer ocean — together with the surface melt — is what really makes a glacier like that retreat and probably Jakobshavn got the double whammy this year,” ocean scientist Josh Willis wrote in an email. Willis leads NASA's Oceans Melting Greenland project, and he conducted field research in Greenland this summer.

In the end, the high amount of ice loss from calving and submarine melting significantly affected the ice sheet's mass balance for this year. But it could have been worse had the surface mass accumulation not been so high. In 2019, low winter snowfall plus a warm summer resulted in a net ice loss of 329 gigatons.

The 2020-21 period “was not close to a record, which I'm very thankful for, but it was another year where we were overall losing ice and not gaining it on the ice sheet,” said Twila Moon, a researcher with the National Snow and Ice Data Center.

From September 1968 to August 2021, the Greenland Ice Sheet has lost around 5,500 gigatons of ice — equivalent to 1.5 centimeters of global average sea level rise.

A harbinger for the future

Climate change is a double-edged sword for Greenland. On one hand, as global temperatures rise, the amount of moisture in the air will increase and could lead to more precipitation — including more snowfall.

“You have an accumulation that is helping to mute the melting and help the mass of Greenland to gain a little,” said Tedesco. “But at the same time, it's something that we think is very connected to what is going to happen as part of global warming.”

Global temperatures will also induce more surface melting and melting from the ocean, with the losses outweighing the increases in snow accumulation, similar to this year.

“What we've seen, if we look at sort of longer-term trends, is that loss of mass from Greenland from increased melt and runoff from the summer would more than offset the increased accumulation that we would see,” said Tom Mote, a climate scientist at the University of Georgia.

Another concern is that the increased snowfall could change to rain as the climate warms. In recent decades, darker, wetter clouds have increasingly moved over Greenland, said Tedesco. This year, rain was prevalent across the ice sheet. Qaqortoq, a town in southern Greenland, set a record daily rainfall of 5.7 inches over the summer. The town of Qaanaaq in northwestern Greenland also experienced flooding. Then, there was the rain on the summit.

“When we see events like we saw in mid-August where we see rainfall at the highest elevations of the ice sheet, I think it portends what we might see in future climates,” said Mote.

Rain negatively affects the health of the ice sheet in several ways. Moon said it can change the shape of the snow grains and make them darker, leading to more sunlight absorption and melting on the surface. The rain can also create ice lenses, which prevent meltwater from percolating into older snow layers in the ground and freezing. Instead, the meltwater would flow off the ice sheet.

Rain would also make life harder for researchers visiting the ice sheet for field research. It would affect everything from the field technology, runways for aircraft, underground food storage and even sewage.

	“With every decade warmer than the last, breaking records is the new normal. The ice sheet is in for a wild ride,” wrote Willis. “And so are we.”
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HEADLINE	11/22 Major hurricane activity takes a pause
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2021/11/22/earth-hurricane-activity-record-quiet/
GIST	<p>After another particularly busy hurricane season in the Atlantic that exhausted the National Hurricane Center’s list of “conventional” storm names, the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season flatlined the second week of October. While Tropical Storm Wanda did briefly interrupt the quiescent interlude at the start of November, the Atlantic has been silent since Nov. 7.</p> <p>It’s not just the Atlantic that’s been eerily quiet. All across the world, the tropics have been devoid of significant cyclone activity. Not a single hurricane-strength storm has formed anywhere on the planet since Oct. 29, a calm occupying the Northern and Southern hemispheres. That’s happened only twice before since 1966, according to Phil Klotzbach, a hurricane researcher at Colorado State University.</p> <p>Perhaps the most bizarre feat has been the lack of major hurricane-strength storms, Category 3 or higher, worldwide since Sept. 25. The absence of storms of this intensity at this time of year hasn’t occurred in at least 65 years. It includes Atlantic and northeast Pacific hurricanes, typhoons in the northwest Pacific and tropical cyclones in the Indian Ocean. These storms are structurally all the same but called different things in different parts of the world.</p> <p>The sudden dearth of these powerhouse storms comes after a feverish start to the Atlantic hurricane season, which stalled suddenly in October.</p> <p>The Atlantic season peaked in late August as Hurricane Ida made a run at Category 5 strength while lashing southeastern Louisiana with catastrophic wind gusts exceeding 150 mph. The storm laid siege to areas 50 miles south of New Orleans, including Grand Isle and Port Fourchon, which were underwater for a time. Ida eventually weakened farther inland and moved up the East Coast as a remnant rainstorm, dumping record moisture in the Northeast that killed more than 40 as extreme flooding gripped southern New England, New York City and Philadelphia. A high-end tornado outbreak accompanied the rains.</p> <p>Then major hurricanes Larry and Sam both racked up considerable ACE, or accumulated cyclone energy, a measure of how much atmospheric energy is expended on tropical systems. But those storms remained mostly out at sea during September and the early part of October. Storm activity simmered markedly as October progressed. The season as a whole will wind up about 18 percent ahead of average from an ACE perspective.</p> <p>Of the various ocean basins supporting tropical storms, the Atlantic is the only one to see above-average activity this year. Ordinarily, the oceans sort of balance out because an increase in hurricane activity and rising air in one basin would probably be tied to sinking motion and reduced storm chances elsewhere. The northeastern Pacific is 29 percent behind average in regards to ACE, with a 38 percent deficit in the northwestern Pacific.</p> <p>Storm activity in the northern Indian Ocean is way below average, and the Southern Hemisphere is virtually silent. The latter is to be expected though because the Southern Hemisphere doesn’t really awaken until December.</p> <p>Klotzbach wrote that wind shear, a change in wind speed and/or direction with height, can explain a lot about the global distribution of storminess. Wind shear has a tendency to disrupt fledgling disturbances and prevent them from organizing. But where wind shear is weak, storms tend to flourish.</p>

Return to Top	<p>The presence of La Niña conditions, which developed this fall, reduces shear in the western Caribbean and favors increased activity, Klotzbach wrote. Conversely, it increases shear in the north Pacific (both the east and west) and limits storm activity.</p> <p>That explains the quiet Pacific, where there has been an abnormal amount of wind shear since mid- to late October.</p> <p>What’s trickier to understand is the Atlantic. The initial period of heightened storminess through September was to be expected due to the lack of wind shear. But Klotzbach described the quiet period in recent weeks as a “surprise” in an email.</p> <p>Last year, which also featured La Niña conditions, Atlantic hurricane season remained very active through October and November. The Caribbean yielded storms Gamma, Delta and Zeta, as well as Category 4 twins Eta and Iota, which both ravaged the same areas in Honduras barely two weeks apart.</p> <p>Klotzbach said that the Caribbean was ripe for development again this year, but the “seeds” that were needed to grow into storm never really made it there to begin with.</p> <p>In addition, Klotzbach pointed to an increase in “outgoing long wave radiation” over the Caribbean detected by satellites. Put simply, satellites in space have spotted more heat radiating out from the region. That signifies a reduction in cloud cover signifying sinking air unfavorable for storm development.</p> <p>The lack of recent tropical activity worldwide is a welcome but temporary respite from a slew of destructive storm seasons, intensified by climate change. Despite the hiatus in storm activity, oceans continue to warm from human-caused heating of the planet and are primed to fuel devastating storms before long.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	11/23 FBI investigates pot shop robbery
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/fbi-investigating-pot-shop-robbery/VQZUVGDS6ZH3LCPJKC3EEPSDUQ/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — In less than a minute, three armed man robbed a Seattle pot shop last Thursday, taking thousands of dollars in cash.</p> <p>“This is probably the worst one that I’ve seen in all my years,” says Chad Alabe who heads security for the Seattle business. “The came in hot. They came in fast.”</p> <p>Police say the three suspects forced their way into the Lake City Uncle Ikes, with guns in hand. One suspect jumped the counter and forced an employee to open a safe in another room. The two other suspects prevent a customer from leaving by hitting him in the head and forcing him to the ground at gunpoint, before one of them runs off and starts grab products off of the wall.</p> <p>Alabe says more and more pot shops are being targeted across the area and the attacks are more brazen. “It seems like you turn on the news and there’s some type of pot shop robbery going on somehow, someway.”</p> <p>Officers are now trying to figure out who these men are, and say the FBI is involved in the investigation.</p> <p>“At the end of the day I hope we get treated equivalent to a bank robbery and these guys get caught and prosecuted,” says Alabe.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Yakima SWAT 14hr-standoff ends in arrest
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SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/a-14-hour-standoff-with-yakima-swat-leads-to-a-mans-arrest
GIST	<p>YAKIMA -- A Yakima man was in custody after a 14-hour standoff with SWAT officers that included shots fired, authorities said.</p> <p>According to the Yakima Police Department, Leon Searles, 42, was arrested Monday following the standoff at a home that lasted for several hours.</p> <p>Authorities say officers made numerous attempts to negotiate with Searles, however, he was not compliant and fired multiple gunshots from inside the house.</p> <p>Police say a witness familiar with the inside of the home told officers that Searles had more than one gun and that one of them was a high-powered rifle.</p> <p>Police then say attempts to deescalate and peacefully resolve the situation were unsuccessful.</p> <p>Due to the danger presented to officers and the public, tactical officers used multiple breaching techniques to gain compliance with the suspect.</p> <p>Authorities say the situation was resolved without injury to officers, or the suspect and Mr. Searles was booked into the County Jail on multiple felony charges.</p> <p>Police say that the original incident was a theft from a local grocery store. The suspect was confronted by security personnel, but he became combative and fled.</p> <p>Officers were able to locate him at his home. The suspect made threats to use firearms towards the officers and was able to barricade inside his home before the incident could be resolved.</p> <p>Authorities say it should be noted that no police officers fired their firearms during this incident.</p> <p>This incident is being investigated by the Yakima Police Internal Affairs Unit.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Bellevue PD patrols to curb retail theft
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/bellevues-downtown-unit-aims-to-limit-retail-theft-during-holiday-shopping
GIST	<p>BELLEVUE, Wash. — With the holiday shopping season fast-approaching, and a disturbing trend of smash-and-grabs hitting high-end retailers around the country, Bellevue Police and its “Downtown Unit” will be on patrol to help curb retail theft.</p> <p>Viral videos taken at Louis Vuitton stores in both Chicago and San Francisco show huge groups of people rushing into the stores and grabbing whatever they can off the shelves. Police in Chicago said 14 people coordinated the hit and stole more than \$120,000 worth of merchandise.</p> <p>“My first thought is frustration,” said Captain Dave Sanabria with the Bellevue Police Department when asked what he makes of the crimes. “That activity is putting a lot of innocent people at risk.”</p> <p>Last summer, during the height of the protests surrounding the police killing of George Floyd, Bellevue Square became ground zero for mass thefts and looting. Video from the ground and Air4 showed crowds of people walking out of the store with clothes and shoes.</p> <p>Sanabria tells KOMO News more than 100 active investigations began shortly after with upwards of 70 charges now having been filed. He said such a move shows the city is serious about prosecuting retail theft.</p> <p>“We served search warrants all across the region for people that were involved with that activity,” he added.</p>

With Thanksgiving and the long holiday weekend ahead, shopping season is set to kickoff. The National Retail Federation estimates there will be a 15 percent increase for in-store, in-person shopping this year compared to last. Bellevue Police will have its “Downtown Unit” out to help keep shoppers safe.

“We’re fortunate here in Bellevue to have a unit dedicated to our downtown corridor and our major shopping districts,” said Sanabria. The unit is made up of one sergeant and six officers.

“They also have some other specialized training to help them respond to active threats and chaotic, rapidly evolving environments.”

BPD is working with loss prevention specialists at some of the major retailers to share leads on possible crimes and those carrying out the crimes. Sanabria admits the city can be attractive to would-be crooks.

“We are obviously a target,” Sanabria said. “We have major shopping centers, high-end shopping centers.”

He urged shoppers to keep valuables and bags out of plain sight in their cars and if possible, to lock those things up before arriving at a parking garage.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Some cities face ‘smash-grab’ crime spree
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/23/us/smash-and-grab-thefts-explainer-cec/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)A wave of "smash-and-grab" crimes is plaguing upscale stores in major US cities, with mobs of thieves making off with expensive goods in brazen, nighttime raids.</p> <p>At least 18 people broke into a Nordstrom department store in Los Angeles Monday night and stole thousands of dollars in merchandise, the city's police chief said.</p> <p>The thefts followed a rash of similar incidents over the weekend in the San Francisco Bay Area. A group of thieves swarmed the Southland Mall in Hayward on Sunday evening, wielding hammers to smash cases at a jewelry store before grabbing items and fleeing.</p> <p>Three suspects were arrested Saturday night after a mob ransacked a Nordstrom department store in Walnut Creek, east of San Francisco. Some 80 suspects were involved, and they fled the outdoor mall in at least 10 different vehicles, police said. That robbery came after similar raids Friday night near San Francisco's Union Square, where thieves targeted Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Bloomingdale's stores, a Walgreens and cannabis dispensaries.</p> <p>And California isn't the only place grappling with "smash-and-grab" crimes. Fourteen robbers barged into a Louis Vuitton store in suburban Chicago last week and fled with more than \$100,000 in handbags and other merchandise.</p> <p>So why so many recent incidents? Are they linked to the holiday season? Is it pandemic restlessness?</p> <p>"This has nothing to do with the pandemic," said Pete Eliadis, a former law enforcement official and founder of security company Intelligence Consulting Partners. "The pandemic is overused at this point."</p> <p>But security experts cited a mix of several other factors.</p> <p>Such cases aren't always a priority for law enforcement</p> <p>San Francisco has seen a surge in crime since it reopened in the pandemic. In the Central district, for example, larceny and theft incidents are up almost 88% from a year earlier, and overall crime is up almost 52%, according to police statistics.</p> <p>Many of the store thieves wear masks or hoods, making them difficult to identify even when they're spotted on security cameras.</p>

Police in Los Angeles and [San Francisco](#) have made some arrests, but thieves often face few consequences, Eliadis said.

One reason for this is law enforcement's lack of resources, which means theft cases sometimes are put on the back burner, he said. And, he added, the "defund the police" movement has sapped some officers' morale.

"There's no political will to prosecute the people in this climate. Why should a police officer waste time getting into an altercation when the person is not going to jail because it's overcrowded and a prosecutor is not going to prosecute that case because it's not high on the priority list?" Eliadis said.

"The takeaway is we need the political will, more prosecution and backing of law enforcement."

Thieves may face few consequences

The decriminalization of low-level offenses in some states has created opportunities for criminals to manipulate the system, said Lynda Buel, president of [Ohio-based security consulting firm SRMC](#).

For example, Proposition 47, a California ballot initiative passed in 2014, sought to alleviate prison overcrowding by reducing the penalties for some crimes. The measure raised the threshold for felony theft from \$500 to \$950.

"For the low-level criminal, the benefit far outweighs the risk, since the threshold for a misdemeanor offense is \$950 -- meaning that a person can steal up to that amount and only be charged with a misdemeanor," Buel said.

Organized crime rings are often behind these types of "smash-and-grab" operations and pay low-level criminals to steal for them, she said.

Security experts said dismantling these sophisticated crime groups must be a law enforcement priority.

"People see the ability to commit these 'smash-and-grab incidents' knowing that there is little consequence, especially if the thefts are kept below the threshold of a felony offense," Buel said. "It's easy, it's fast, and the payback is good."

The holidays provide more opportunities for theft

It's not unusual for "smash and grabs" to increase around the Christmas holiday season, Buel said.

Stores stock up before the holidays, which means there's a bounty of merchandise to pick from. That means more opportunities and more convenience for the smash-and-grabbers, she said.

But retail theft by organized gangs is not limited to the holiday season. [In July, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed](#) a law reinstating a task force to investigate organized theft at stores.

"This is not new in the state ... We've been organized in a very deliberative manner to address the issue of organized retail crime for a number of years," [Newsom said](#). "We are doubling down on those efforts today."

In Illinois, Attorney General Kwame Raoul [said in September](#) that crime rings are costing retailers across the country an estimated \$45 billion in annual losses. He created a task force to crack down on organized crime rings that target stores.

"These brazen, violent crimes are committed by sophisticated criminal organizations that are involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking and other serious crimes," Raoul said.

There are numerous places to sell stolen items

Once items are stolen, there are several ways to sell them -- all extremely easy and with little regulation and monitoring from law enforcement, experts said. Most items grabbed in such cases have no serial numbers, making tracing them almost impossible, Eliadis said.

"It is incredibly easy to sell stolen merchandise online through e-commerce platforms," Buel said. "E-commerce has really taken off as the place to sell stolen goods."

Other thieves don't need to sell their stolen goods on Craigslist or eBay. They can also use flea markets, pawn shops and street vendors. Thieves can sell expensive items at slashed prices, meaning there's no shortage of buyers, Eliadis added.

The result is a ruthless cycle that affects everyone, Eliadis said. Some affected stores will shut down or relocate. And retailers plagued by thefts see their insurance rates and private security costs increase -- costs that eventually get passed on to the customer.

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HEADLINE	11/24 Jurors Arbery killing trial deliberate
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/24/us/ahmaud-arbery-killing-trial-wednesday-jury-deliberations/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Following more than two weeks of court proceedings and testimony from 23 witnesses, jurors in the Ahmaud Arbery killing trial are set to begin their second day of deliberations Wednesday morning.</p> <p>The jury reviewed the case for more than six hours Tuesday after the prosecution presented a rebuttal to the defense's closing arguments. Court will resume at 8:30 a.m ET.</p> <p>Three men -- Travis McMichael, his father Gregory McMichael, and neighbor William "Roddie" Bryan Jr. -- are standing trial on charges related to the shooting of Arbery in the Satilla Shores neighborhood outside Brunswick, Georgia, on February 23, 2020.</p> <p>Each of the defendants face nine separate charges, including malice and felony murder, aggravated assault, false imprisonment and criminal attempt to commit a felony. If the jury finds Bryan not guilty of a second aggravated assault charge, they can consider three lesser misdemeanor charges for simple assault, reckless conduct, or reckless driving.</p> <p>The defendants have pleaded not guilty to all charges. The McMichaels claim they were conducting a citizen's arrest after suspecting Arbery of burglary of a nearby home under construction, and that Travis McMichael acted in self-defense by shooting Arbery. Bryan maintains he is innocent of any wrongdoing.</p> <p>If jury deliberations continue past Wednesday, court will adjourn for the Thanksgiving holiday and deliberations may resume Friday and Saturday if needed.</p> <p>Authorities are preparing for all possible outcomes following a verdict in terms of public reaction, which has been keyed in on a trial that consistently revolved around issues of self-defense and race.</p> <p>"We plan for the worst, but we hope for the best. But we're trying to come up with contingencies for many different scenarios that could unfold as a result of the verdict," said Glynn County Police Department Captain Jeremiah Bergquist, who also heads the local task force unit overseeing public safety during the trial.</p> <p>Prosecution gave rebuttal Tuesday Attorneys for each of the three defendants offered different arguments Monday for why their clients were not guilty.</p> <p>Alongside Travis McMichael's central argument of self-defense, Gregory McMichael's attorney Laura Hogue repeatedly claimed that Arbery was a habitual trespasser in the area, and said jurors should consider that Gregory McMichael had proper reasonable suspicion of Arbery to act.</p>

Kevin Gough, an attorney for Bryan, said Bryan was more of a witness than anything else and that his [video showing the shooting](#) enabled the case to move forward.

Tuesday brought a rebuttal from lead prosecutor Linda Dunikoski, who emphasized to the jury that the men acted on suspicions alone and had no evidence Arbery had committed a crime. Travis McMichael also had inconsistencies from testimony in court when compared to statements made to police right after the shooting, she added.

Dunikoski said all three men were [culpable of the charges faced](#) because they could have de-escalated the situation by calling police or not chasing Arbery. Instead, she argued, the men committed aggravated assault with their trucks when chasing and trying to falsely imprison Arbery, leading to the moment Travis McMichael shot and killed Arbery.

"If you take that out, would he be alive?" she asked the jury of Arbery. "It's real simple. The answer is you can't take out any of these crimes. If you take out any one of these crimes that they committed and he's still alive. All of the underlying felonies played a substantial and necessary part in causing the death of Ahmaud Arbery."

Wanda Cooper-Jones, Arbery's mother, said Tuesday after court proceedings that Dunikoski "did a fantastic job" in her final rebuttal.

"She presented the evidence again very well. I do think that we will come back with a guilty verdict, and I want to leave with this: God has brought us this far, and he's not going to fail us now. We will get justice for Ahmaud," she told reporters.

Marcus Arbery Sr., Arbery's father, said what he saw in the courtroom was "devastating," but also expressed confidence in getting a guilty verdict.

After the jury started to deliberate, Travis McMichael's attorney, Jason Sheffield said, "I feel very confident in the case that we have put forward. I feel very confident in the evidence of Travis' innocence," adding "we will accept the verdict whatever it is."

Makeup of jury was source of contention

Nine White women, two White men and one Black man are serving on the trial jury, with two White women and one White man serving as jury alternates, according to a CNN analysis of juror data.

Only having one Black juror has been a key complaint from prosecutors and Arbery's family, as Glynn County's population is about 69% White and 26% Black, according to 2019 data from the US Census Bureau. Arbery was Black and the defendants are White.

The 12-member trial jury and three alternates were selected after a protracted [jury selection process](#) that lasted two and a half weeks and included summoning 1,000 prospective jurors from the South Georgia coastal community. Of those summoned, less than half showed up.

The makeup of the jury was [challenged by the state](#) at the conclusion of the jury selection process. Dunikoski claimed defense attorneys disproportionately struck qualified Black jurors and based some of their strikes on race.

Judge Timothy Walmsley said, "This court has found that there appears to be intentional discrimination," but ruled that the case [could go forward](#) with the selected jurors because the defense was able to provide valid reasons, beyond race, for why the other Black jurors were dismissed.

Defense attorneys [also took issue](#) with there being fewer older White men without college degrees in the juror pool, saying the demographic was underrepresented.

HEADLINE	11/23 KCSO warns of brazen shoplifters
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/as-shoppers-return-to-king-countys-business-centers-so-do-shoplifters/281-1208e5bb-5620-4bf0-9421-e8152e275911
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — After the pandemic and subsequent economic downturn, downtown Seattle is coming back, at least according to General Manager of Simply Seattle Jacob Smidt.</p> <p>“It feels to me that the city is really waking back up, especially during the summer, it was really busy,” Smidt said.</p> <p>Simply Seattle is one of many retailers that was hit hard by shoplifters. In August of 2020, the owners shut down their Pioneer Square location citing ongoing theft.</p> <p>“Our staff right now is trained really well and I think has done a really good job of making themselves known with a bunch of people that are coming in and trying to shoplift and letting them know that they are not going to be able to get in and target our stores,” Smidt said.</p> <p>They may have their work cut out for them as the King County Sheriff’s Office warns of brazen shoplifters – citing a sting last week in Covington.</p> <p>Deputies arrested five people in one evening, recovering more than \$5,700 in merchandise.</p> <p>“What we want to do is take any incentive out of organized retail thieves to go out there and do what they do that way merchandise stays in our stores and with our retailers that are so vital to our communities,” Sgt. Tim Meyer said.</p> <p>In October, a group of downtown Seattle businesses and organizations urged elected officials to invest more in public safety and mental health services, citing some areas have been hit hard by shoplifting and drug trafficking.</p> <p>"Retail theft is rampant and visible organized fencing operations are costing retailers millions in stolen goods and additional expenses for increased security," the Downtown Seattle Association wrote in a letter to the Seattle City Council and King County Council.</p> <p>The group asked the council to support Mayor Jenny Durkan's public safety and housing investments in the proposed 2022 budget. The council finalized the budget on Monday. It includes additional funding for the Seattle Police Department, but is not focused on significantly increasing the force.</p> <p>The association also asked the city council to establish a grant program to help businesses and venues pay for private security.</p> <p>Shops like Simply Seattle who say they're bracing for what could be the busiest holiday season they’ve seen since the pandemic first changed all our lives nearly two years ago.</p> <p>“I think people are going to get their shopping done a little earlier than we’ve seen in the past and we may have a really steady December as opposed to that rush, two three, the day before something like that,” Smidt said.</p> <p>According to law enforcement much of the stolen merchandise ends up on online marketplaces. While craigslist has been around for more than 20 years today deputies say that sites like Facebook Marketplace and Offer up are making it even easier for criminals to sell stolen goods and they ask consumers to be cautious if a deal appears to good to be true.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Catalytic converters stolen SEA garage
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SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-arrest-thieves-stealing-catalytic-converters-sea-tac-garage/GCMIE2RGFRDG7JUQYLBAY4Q6I/
GIST	<p>SEA-TAC, Wash. — Drivers continue to have catalytic converters stolen from their cars, including in the parking garage at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.</p> <p>Port of Seattle Police report at least 175 catalytic converter thefts from the airport garage in 2021.</p> <p>The most targeted car is the Toyota Prius, which has a lot of the precious metal thieves are seeking. The thefts in the airport garage have happened in a matter of minutes.</p> <p>“You’ll have one individual jacking up the car and two individuals cutting out the catalytic converter,” said port police Sgt. Darrin Benko.</p> <p>To combat the thefts, port police recently deployed a Prius as a bait car.</p> <p>“If the suspect is to jack up the Prius or manipulate it, it creates an alarm that goes directly to our communications,” Benko said.</p> <p>That’s happened twice in the past month, resulting in four arrests and the identification of a couple more suspects.</p> <p>Port police say they obtained admissions of thirty catalytic converter thefts in the airport garage.</p> <p>Police suggest drivers pick a well-lit area to park and say people who notice anything suspicious while walking through the airport garage should report it right away.</p> <p>A KIRO 7 investigation earlier this year showed catalytic converter thefts are widespread.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Officer convicted of rape: home detention
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/11/23/baltimore-officer-rape-house-detention-westerman/
GIST	<p>A Baltimore County police officer convicted of rape was allowed to remain on home detention, prosecutors announced Monday, after a judge determined at the man’s sentencing that there was “not evidence of any psychological injury to the victim,” even though the woman claimed she received therapy.</p> <p>Anthony Westerman was convicted in August on multiple counts of rape, sexual offense and assault of a 22-year-old woman in 2017. Westerman, 27, who was separately convicted of assaulting another woman in 2019, was sentenced Friday to 15 years in prison for second-degree rape.</p> <p>But Circuit Judge Keith Truffer suspended all of the sentence but four years of home detention for the 2017 conviction while Westerman pursues an appeal. Truffer also sentenced Westerman to just one day in jail for the 2019 assault, which he described as a “boorish” act, according to prosecutors.</p> <p>Scott D. Shellenberger, the state’s attorney for Baltimore County, said in a news release that Truffer “determined that there was not evidence of any psychological injury to the victim despite the fact that she indicated she has received therapy for the attack on her and that the Judge had stated at the time of the verdict that what had happened to the victim ‘may be the most traumatic moment of’ her life.”</p> <p>Shellenberger said in a statement to The Washington Post that “the sentence was not what we expected or were asking for.”</p> <p>“I do not believe that in this particular case that home detention is an appropriate sentence,” he said. “A police officer should know as well or better than others the reprehensibility of such an act. I fear this could cause rape victims to hesitate to report their crimes if they do not feel like they will get justice.”</p>

Brian Thompson, Westerman's attorney, said it was "factually incorrect" to say the judge sentenced his client to home detention and that Westerman could still face prison time. Thompson, who described the matter as a "he said, she said case," said the prosecution failed to submit "reasonable proof" of the victim's psychological trauma to the court record. Westerman plans to appeal the conviction, he said.

"He maintains his innocence, and we intend to keep fighting until we clear his name," Thompson said of Westerman. "He did not commit a crime. This was two drunk people hooking up, and it turned into an alleged crime several years later."

A spokesperson with the Baltimore County Police Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Westerman, who joined the department in 2013, has been suspended without pay, prosecutors said.

The judge's ruling follows by a week another case in which a man convicted of rape was not given prison time at his sentencing. Christopher Belter, a 20-year-old New York man who pleaded guilty to rape and sexual abuse for assaulting four teenage girls during parties at his parents' home, will not face prison time after a judge sentenced him to eight years' probation. Although Belter faced a maximum sentence of eight years in prison, Niagara County Court Judge Matthew J. Murphy III concluded that time behind bars for the man "would be inappropriate."

On Oct. 4, 2017, Westerman was off duty at a bar when he told a woman that he would arrange for an Uber to take her and her friend to her friend's home, according to court records. Instead, he had the driver take all three of them to his home, where he allegedly raped the 22-year-old woman while she was unconscious, according to prosecutors. When she awoke, she told prosecutors, Westerman was forcing himself on her. She told her friend what happened, and the pair left immediately, prosecutors say.

Thompson told The Post that the woman was conscious and that evidence presented in court shows the act was consensual.

In a separate incident in June 2019, a woman told police that Westerman grabbed her and tried to kiss her multiple times during a birthday party at a bar until she left, according to charging documents. He was again off duty.

The woman in the 2017 incident came forward to investigators in 2019. A third woman had also come forward to report another alleged rape, but Westerman was later acquitted of all counts related to that case, according to the Baltimore Sun.

The 2017 and 2019 cases were tried together by Truffer, a 2016 appointee of Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (R), without a jury. Although prosecutors asked that Westerman serve five to 10 years in prison, Shellenberger told The Post that the officer received a lighter sentence because the judge removed one count of second-degree rape and found that the victim had not suffered psychological injury.

Thompson emphasized that neither the prosecutors nor the victim formally outlined her psychological injury in court. He added that the judge has "stayed" the sentence as Westerman pursues an appeal. The defense team plans to file an appeal within 30 days, and the process is expected to take roughly a year to 18 months, he said.

Although Westerman could still face prison time, Shellenberger indicated to The Post that it was unlikely to happen because of what is expected to be a long appeals process.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Autocratic nations exploit Interpol?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/interpol-chooses-new-leadership-as-western-worries-grow-over-red-notice-11637690224?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1

Interpol's governing body gathers this week to choose a new president, one that Western governments hope will block authoritarian states from using the global law enforcement agency [to pursue political dissidents](#) across borders.

The election will seat Interpol's first full-term president since the last incumbent, senior Chinese security official Meng Hongwei, vanished during a 2018 trip home. Mr. Meng later appeared in court and [was sentenced to 13 years imprisonment](#) on bribery charges that his wife says were concocted by his political rivals in Beijing.

At stake is whether Interpol—the central node for police departments around the world—can sustain a yearslong effort to weed out fugitive alerts known as red notices issued against dissidents that countries such as China, Russia and Turkey, where the election is being held, consider legitimate targets.

Beijing is trying to place one of Mr. Meng's former subordinates, Police Counselor Hu Binchen, on Interpol's executive committee. That 13-member panel exerts oversight over Secretary-General Jürgen Stock, a German civil servant under Western pressure to block autocratic governments, including China, from misusing the red-notice system. Twelve of the committee's seats, including the president's, will be filled this week.

It isn't clear whether Washington and its allies have managed to find a presidential contender who can win the required two-thirds vote on Thursday. The U.S. currently has no seats on the executive committee, hasn't held the presidency since 1988, and is considering legislation introduced in the Senate in May that would limit the ability of police to act on the basis of red notices alone.

Even if the U.S. and its supporters succeed in installing a candidate, the presidency—unpaid and largely ceremonial—exerts only so much influence at the 98-year-old institution, wielding a vote equal to that of other members on the executive committee.

Whoever wins, the broader trend of autocratic governments attempting to use the agency to further their own political goals is likely to continue, said officials and analysts closely following Interpol.

"It's not about the person who is in charge, it's more about the system," said Giulio Calcara, a lecturer in international criminal law at the University of Eastern Finland. "Interpol is a system that requires the good faith of its participants."

Presidential candidates include Czech Police Colonel Šárka Havráňková, an Interpol vice president. Another nominee, Ahmed Naser al-Raisi of the United Arab Emirates, has campaigned for the office, saying he can modernize Interpol by bringing in his autocratic government's experience maintaining surveillance technology.

Governments are also electing a new Commission for the Control of Interpol's Files, a seven-member panel responsible for ensuring Interpol complies with the human-rights commitments laid out in its constitution.

"No individual member of the Executive Committee, including the president, has any involvement or influence in the decision making process to publish or cancel a Red Notice," a statement from Interpol said. "As a global law enforcement organization, Interpol provides a neutral platform for police to work directly with their counterparts, even between countries which do not have diplomatic relations."

Mr. Hu, the Chinese official seeking a post on the executive committee, worked closely for 20 years with Mr. Meng, the former president now imprisoned in China, said his wife, Grace Meng.

Mr. Hu would take the job under the ever-present threat of being jailed if he runs afoul of China's central leadership, she added.

"I am very worried about the future of Interpol," she said.

Interpol doesn't investigate or prosecute crimes. Its total annual budget—136 million euros, equivalent to \$153 million—is slightly less than that of Florida's Orlando Police Department. Instead, its most important job is maintaining a database that notifies countries around the world if a fugitive is wanted. Within minutes of receiving the name of a person wanted in one country, national police in another can pursue the suspect.

At present, about 66,370 such red notices are active.

Most alert requests are based on legitimate and often serious or violent crimes. But as much as 5% are rejected, Mr. Stock, the secretary-general, has said, because they fall short of Interpol's requirements or are aimed at political targets. Red-notice requests often contain very little information beyond a name and a description of the crime, sometimes little more than a single word.

When a dissident named on a red notice crosses a border or gets involved in a routine legal matter, police can act fast. In September, police in Poland detained Belarusian activist Makary Malachowski, a mix-up that the Polish government—normally antagonistic toward Belarus—attributed to misuse of Interpol's red-notice system.

Banks can decline to transact with red-noticed individuals, embassies frequently look at the notices when considering visas, and government critics—from ordinary citizens to celebrities—are forced to take them into account when traveling. In 2019, NBA star Enes Kanter, a vocal critic of Turkey's government, called off appearances in Toronto and London after the Turkish government requested a red notice to be issued against him.

Since Mr. Stock took office in 2014, the agency has created what it calls a specialized task force directed to review every red-notice request as it comes in. If a request doesn't comply, it is refused, Interpol says. But that task force has no privileged access to the strength of evidence against each fugitive, and disentangling complex crimes—especially corruption-related offenses—from politically motivated charges can be onerous.

"It's not working, and it needs a fundamental overhaul," said Toby Cadman, a barrister and international law specialist who has represented more than 100 clients seeking to have red notices against them overturned or disregarded. "It's quite opaque with very few oversight mechanisms and over a number of years we've seen warrants being issued against activists, political opponents.... We generally get those warrants removed, but the damage is done, unfortunately."

In Washington, eight senators—four Democrats and four Republicans—introduced a bill in May that would require additional checks before U.S. police act on Interpol notices. It would also have the U.S. "use the voice, vote and influence of the United States, as appropriate, within Interpol's General Assembly and Executive Committee to promote" increased screening of red notices.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Exonerated in 3 killings after 43yrs in prison
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/23/us/kevin-strickland-exonerated.html
GIST	<p>After being exonerated on Tuesday for a 1978 triple murder in Kansas City for which he had spent more than 43 years in prison, Kevin Strickland, 62, went straight from prison to his mother's grave.</p> <p>"That was the first stop that we made," his lawyer, Tricia Rojo Bushnell, said in an interview.</p> <p>Mr. Strickland's mother, Rosetta Thornton, died in August, but he had not been able to visit her grave site as he was serving time for a crime he vehemently says he had no role in: the April 25, 1978, murders of Sherrie Black, 22, Larry Ingram, 21, and John Walker, 20.</p>

Mr. Strickland was convicted in 1979 of one count of capital murder and two counts of second-degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for 50 years and two concurrent 10-year-sentences.

But in exonerating him on Tuesday, Judge James Welsh, of Missouri's Western District Court of Appeals, noted that Mr. Strickland had been convicted despite a lack of physical evidence linking him to the crime scene, that another man convicted in the killings said Mr. Strickland had not been involved and that the only eyewitness had later tried to recant her testimony.

Mr. Strickland spent longer in prison than anyone in Missouri who was later exonerated, according to the [National Registry of Exonerations](#).

The case against Mr. Strickland had largely been built around the testimony of Cynthia Douglas, the only eyewitness and survivor of the attack in 1978. After being treated for gunshot wounds to her arm and leg, Ms. Douglas was able to identify two of four men responsible for the attack but could not identify the other two.

"By all accounts, Douglas was hysterical at the time, suffering from two gunshot wounds and having just witnessed the execution of three friends," Judge Welsh wrote in his opinion. From a live lineup, Ms. Douglas later chose Mr. Strickland, who was in custody and was "a known associate" of two of the men Ms. Douglas had identified.

The two men, Vincent Bell and Kilm Adkins, pleaded guilty in 1979 for their roles in the murders. In his testimony, Mr. Bell "remained adamant that Strickland was not present at the crime scene and played no part in the commission of the triple homicide," the judge wrote.

Within a year of Mr. Strickland's conviction, Ms. Douglas began to reveal to those close to her that she had misidentified Mr. Strickland as an assailant in the attack, according to court records. It was not until 2009, however, that she sent an email to the [Midwest Innocence Project](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to investigating and litigating for the wrongfully convicted.

"I am seeking info on how to help someone that was wrongfully accused," wrote Ms. Douglas, who died in 2015. "This incident happened back in 1978, I was the only eyewitness and things were not clear back then, but now I know more and would like to help this person if I can."

Sometime after Ms. Douglas wrote the Midwest Innocence Project, Mr. Strickland also contacted the nonprofit seeking help. The group took up his case and began an investigation.

In its own 2020 investigation, [The Kansas City Star](#) reported that Mr. Bell and Mr. Adkins had sworn that Strickland was not with them during the attack.

The review of the case was made possible at the request of a Jackson County prosecutor who said that evidence used in Mr. Strickland's conviction had been recanted or disproved, which prompted an evidentiary hearing in Mr. Strickland's case two weeks ago.

In his ruling, which was filed on Tuesday, Judge Welsh wrote: "The Court's confidence in Strickland's convictions is so undermined that it cannot stand, and the judgment of conviction must be set aside. Absent Douglas's positive, unequivocal identification of Strickland, there would have been no charge, no trial, and certainly no conviction."

Gov. Mike Parson of Missouri, a Republican, chose earlier this year not to pardon Mr. Strickland. Still, in posts on [Twitter](#) about Mr. Strickland's exoneration on Tuesday, Governor Parson acknowledged that a bill he had signed into law this year "created a judicial procedure for prosecuting attorneys to use, in cases like this one, where the prosecutor believes that there was a miscarriage of justice and a wrongful conviction was entered."

“The Court has made its decision, we respect the decision, and the Department of Corrections will proceed with Mr. Strickland’s release immediately,” Governor Parson said.

After visiting his mother’s grave on Tuesday, Mr. Strickland went to dinner with friends, family members and Ms. Rojo Bushnell, his lawyer.

“He’s described it as that there isn’t yet a word for the emotion that he has because it’s a little bit of so many things,” Ms. Rojo Bushnell said in the interview on Tuesday night, stepping away from the dinner. “There’s joy, but there’s also sadness and grief and anger and all of that combined into one thing.”

Jackson County Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker, a Democrat, said that the exoneration “brings justice — finally — to a man who has tragically suffered so so greatly as a result of this wrongful conviction.”

“To say we’re extremely pleased and grateful is an understatement,” Ms. Baker said.

But not all were pleased. Missouri’s attorney general, Eric Schmitt, a Republican running for U.S. Senate in 2022, fought the exoneration. His office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Tuesday night.

Mr. Strickland still faces several challenges. Because he was exonerated without DNA evidence, Mr. Strickland is not entitled to compensation from the state, his lawyer said. He will also need help getting an identification card, a bank account and clothing.

“These are all questions he’s never had to think about or been able to think about that he’ll be having to do very quickly,” Ms. Rojo Bushnell said. “We’re ecstatic that he’s home, but we also just know that there’s nothing that will give him that time back.”

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HEADLINE	11/23 Italy frees convicted killer UK student
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/23/world/europe/rudy-guede-free-killer-meredith-kercher.html
GIST	<p>ROME — An Italian judge on Tuesday released the only person definitively convicted of the 2007 murder of the 21-year-old British student Meredith Kercher, a polarizing case that is still hotly debated both inside and outside the country.</p> <p>Rudy Guede was freed after completing 13 years of his 16-year sentence with time off for good behavior, according to his lawyer, Fabrizio Ballarini, and court documents. He has always maintained his innocence, the lawyer said.</p> <p>Mr. Guede began a work-release program in September 2019, and a year later, he was placed on probation, living on his own and working during the day, his lawyer said. Through his lawyer, Mr. Guede declined to comment.</p> <p>The murder in the picturesque central Italian town of Perugia immediately drew salacious headlines in Italy, Britain and the United States, fueling parental nightmares about students abroad. Ms. Kercher, a student at the University of Leeds, had been taking courses in Perugia.</p> <p>Her body was found on Nov. 1, 2007, in the apartment she shared with Amanda Knox, a 20-year-old student from Seattle. Five days after the murder, Ms. Knox and her boyfriend at the time, Raffaele Sollecito, were arrested and charged with the crime. Prosecutors initially depicted the murder as drug-fueled sex game gone awry.</p> <p>Mr. Guede, born in the Ivory Coast and raised in Italy, was arrested in Germany on Nov. 20. Then 20, he was an acquaintance of the tenants on the ground floor of the two-story house where Ms. Kercher and Ms. Knox had lived. The police found his bloody fingerprints in the victim's bedroom and his DNA on her clothes and on her body.</p>

He was put on trial separately from Ms. Knox and Mr. Sollecito, was convicted and was [initially sentenced](#) to 30 years in prison. The sentence was reduced to 16 years [on appeal](#). Ms. Knox and Mr. Sollecito, also initially convicted, spent four years in prison while their case bounced around various Italian courts. They were then cleared of the murder charge [in 2015](#).

Francesco Maresca, the lawyer for the Kercher family, said that Mr. Guede's reduced sentence was in line with Italian law. But perhaps "there's a moral consideration to be made, one of justice that, in the end, he served a relatively light sentence given the seriousness of the crime," he added.

"Mr. Guede did his time and so now, we put an end to this story," he said.

Mr. Guede served most of his sentence in Viterbo, a town about 50 miles north of Rome, and obtained a university degree while in prison, his lawyer said.

Since he began working outside prison and living on his own, he has been strictly controlled. He volunteers in the mornings in a soup kitchen and works in the afternoon at the library of [a Viterbo-based private institute](#) that offers courses in criminology.

"He's someone who is just trying to get his life back on track," said Claudio Mariani, a professor at the Viterbo institute who has been mentoring Mr. Guede for the past 13 years.

Ms. Knox returned to the United States in 2011 after her initial conviction was overturned by an appeals court. In 2019, Europe's [top human rights court ruled](#) that she had been deprived of adequate legal aid during an interrogation, and questioned the strength of the DNA evidence that had been used to convict her. It ordered Italy to pay her \$21,000 in damages.

She said in a [recent interview](#) that she is still struggling to put her wrongful conviction behind her.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Wisconsin parade death toll rises to 6
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/23/us/waukesha-parade-brooks-court.html
GIST	<p>WAUKESHA, Wis. — The reserve police officer radioed in with an alarming report. Two people witnessed a fight, possibly involving knives, outside the Rotary Building at a riverfront park in Waukesha, Wis.</p> <p>Within seconds, several officers said they would head there. The dispatcher told them to hurry. But when the first patrolman arrived, near the spot where kayaks are rented out in less frigid months, whatever fight might have happened was over.</p> <p>"I'm by the Rotary Building and the baseball diamond," the officer said, his voice calm. "There's nothing here."</p> <p>About a minute later, panic crackled across the police scanner. The driver of a maroon S.U.V. was charging through the Waukesha Christmas parade on Main Street, not far from the park, barreling over marching band members and a troupe of Dancing Grannies. He wasn't stopping.</p> <p>The authorities in Waukesha accused Darrell E. Brooks, 39, of killing six people and wounding more than 60 others in the attack at the parade on Sunday evening. They said he had been fleeing a nearby domestic dispute that may have involved a knife — an apparent reference to the earlier incident at the park.</p> <p>Mr. Brooks, who cried at the defense table in his first court appearance on Tuesday afternoon, was charged with five counts of first-degree intentional homicide and ordered held on \$5 million cash bail. Prosecutors said they learned of the sixth death, of an 8-year-old boy, on Tuesday and intended to file another homicide charge.</p>

“There are not words to describe the risk that this defendant presents to our community,” Susan L. Oppen, the Waukesha County district attorney, said in court, where she referred to accounts by detectives who said Mr. Brooks had seemed to intentionally steer into people.

“He was told to stop by police officers,” Ms. Oppen said. “They risked their own safety to try to step in front of the car to stop him. Everything was done to get him to stop — and he just simply continued down the roadway, causing death and destruction.”

Kevin Costello, the court commissioner who presided over the bail hearing, granted prosecutors’ request for the \$5 million bail.

“It’s an extraordinarily serious case, with an extraordinary history of this gentleman — of fleeing, of hurting people, of not following court orders, not following criminal laws, not following just your societal norms,” Mr. Costello said.

A lawyer for Mr. Brooks said little in court, but told the court that his client was indigent. Mr. Brooks, who wore a dark green vest and white face mask, hung his head for most of the hearing.

On Tuesday, as some victims remained hospitalized, Waukesha residents were still trying to piece together what had happened in their usually calm downtown over the weekend. With public schools in the Milwaukee suburb closed again on Tuesday, flags flew at half-staff and buses displayed the message “Waukesha Strong.”

The police have provided only limited details about the attack, and did not respond to questions about whether the domestic incident Mr. Brooks was accused of fleeing was the fight reported at the park. No similar disputes were discussed in the minutes before the attack on a Waukesha police scanner feed published online by Broadcastify.

Greg Legate, who lives about half a mile from the end of the parade route, said he called the police on Sunday evening after coming upon a stranger, later identified as Mr. Brooks, standing on his next-door neighbor’s porch. Mr. Legate said he had just returned home from the parade, where he and his family saw an older woman hit by the S.U.V. fly into the air and land on the curb in front of them, apparently dead.

“I knew they were looking for somebody and figured it was the guy from the parade because that was the direction he was heading,” Mr. Legate said.

When he first approached his neighbor and Mr. Brooks, Mr. Legate sensed something was wrong. His neighbor, he said, whose doorbell camera recorded footage of their encounter, seemed unaware of the manhunt at the time.

“I didn’t care whether he was the guy or not,” Mr. Legate said, “it was my responsibility to call.”

Without uttering a word, Mr. Legate went around the corner in the dark to dial 911, standing behind his house. Mr. Brooks, he said, “was just looking at me funny.”

“When I went around the corner,” Mr. Legate continued, “he was looking around to see where I was going.”

To the dispatcher, Mr. Legate recalled saying, “The man that you are looking for, I believe, is at my neighbor’s house.”

Within a minute of the 911 call, he said, the police were there. Mr. Legate said he and his friends sat in their car and watched while officers took Mr. Brooks into custody.

“They were there with guns drawn and telling the man to put his hands up,” Mr. Legate said on Tuesday. “It was fast.”

Mr. Brooks, who did not speak in court, had been arrested in the Milwaukee area repeatedly over the years, accused at various points of battery and domestic abuse and resisting the police. Prosecutors on Tuesday spent several minutes describing his criminal record from several Wisconsin counties, as well as for a sex crime in Nevada, where there is an active warrant for his arrest, and a recent arrest in Georgia.

A woman who had a child with Mr. Brooks almost two decades ago said in an interview on Tuesday that his temper was easily ignited. The woman, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because she did not want herself or her child to be publicly associated with Mr. Brooks, said that she knew he had anger issues, but that he had never been abusive toward her.

Just a few weeks ago, prosecutors in Milwaukee County said Mr. Brooks intentionally ran over another woman he knew with a maroon Ford Escape.

Prosecutors said they had erred in recommending a \$1,000 cash bail in that case. Mr. Brooks posted that bail, then was held in custody for a few days while awaiting transfer to Waukesha County for a warrant issued over unpaid child support. He was sent to the jail in Waukesha on Nov. 16 and released later that day after telling a judge he had missed the support payments because he had been jailed in Georgia.

Days after his release, on what had been a celebratory night, with a beloved parade returning from a pandemic hiatus and children lining the streets, Mr. Brooks was back in Waukesha. Police officers and prosecutors said he seemed to maximize damage as he rampaged through the parade route.

“It looks like there was either panic or whatever, or an intentional act for whatever reason,” Mr. Costello said. “You don’t do well under pressure.”

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HEADLINE	11/23 Jury rules pharmacies fueled opioid crisis
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/23/health/walmart-cvs-opioid-lawsuit-verdict.html
GIST	<p>A federal jury in Cleveland on Tuesday found that three of the nation’s largest pharmacy chains — CVS Health, Walmart and Walgreens — had substantially contributed to the crisis of opioid overdoses and deaths in two Ohio counties, the first time the retail segment of the drug industry has been held accountable in the decades-long epidemic.</p> <p>After hearings in the spring, the trial judge will determine how much each company should pay the counties.</p> <p>The verdict — the first from a jury in an opioid case — was encouraging to plaintiffs in thousands of lawsuits nationwide because they are all relying on the same legal strategy: that pharmaceutical companies contributed to a “public nuisance,” a claim that plaintiffs contend covers the public health crisis created by opioids.</p> <p>The public nuisance argument was rejected twice this month, by judges in California and Oklahoma in state cases against opioid manufacturers. The judges found that according to the specifics of their own states’ public nuisance laws, the companies’ activities were too removed from the overdoses and deaths and that the laws had been applied too expansively.</p> <p>In this case, brought by Lake and Trumbull Counties in northeastern Ohio, lawyers for the plaintiffs used the legal claim successfully. They argued that for years, the pharmacies had turned a blind eye to countless red flags about suspicious opioid orders, both at local counters where patients obtained the drugs and at corporate headquarters, where oversight requirements were, according to Mark Lanier, the counties’ lead trial lawyer, “too little, too late.”</p>

After a six-week trial, the 12-member jury deliberated for five and a half days.

“It’s the first opioid trial against these major household names,” said Adam Zimmerman, who teaches mass litigation at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. “They have been the least willing group of defendants to settle, so this verdict is at least a small sign to them that these cases won’t necessarily play out well in front of juries.” It could prod some pharmacy defendants to consider settling rather than going to trial, he said.

But Mr. Zimmerman also noted that the opioid lawsuits, which span the country and are scheduled to go to trial in a number of state and federal courts, still have a long way to go.

“It’s more like there are many different ballgames going on at once, each with slightly different rules, and we’re in the early innings of almost all of them,” he said, adding that because each state has its own public nuisance law, the three recent outcomes may have little legal effect on upcoming cases.

But even as thousands of opioid cases, the first of which were filed in 2014, lumber along, the urgency of getting help to opioid-shattered communities has not slowed. New federal data released last week show overdose deaths from opioids have reached record levels during the pandemic, driven by soaring fatalities from illegal opioids such as heroin and street fentanyl.

The deep-pocketed retailers were the last cluster of pharmaceutical corporations to be pursued in the courts. To date, they have faced fewer lawsuits than other pharmaceutical companies.

This past summer, Walgreens, Rite Aid, CVS and Walmart settled with two New York counties, Nassau and Suffolk, for a combined \$26 million. In the Ohio case, Rite Aid and Giant Eagle, a regional chain, settled earlier for undisclosed sums.

In contrast, some opioid manufacturers and distributors have committed billions of dollars in settlement offers, some nationwide.

“The judgment today against Walmart, Walgreens and CVS represents the overdue reckoning for their complicity in creating a public nuisance,” the lawyers for the two counties, along with lawyers for local governments across the country, said in a statement after the verdict Tuesday afternoon.

CVS, Walgreens and Walmart said they would appeal the verdict. “Pharmacists fill legal prescriptions written by D.E.A.-licensed doctors who prescribe legal, F.D.A.-approved substances to treat actual patients in need,” CVS said in a statement.

The statement continued, “We look forward to the appeals court review of this case, including the misapplication of public nuisance law.”

In closing arguments at the trial in U.S. District Court in Cleveland last week, Mr. Lanier, a Texas trial lawyer who represented the counties, said the pharmacy chains were “making money off every pill they sell.”

He added, “They don’t make money off a refusal to fill.”

But licensed pharmacists, he added, are gatekeepers who have a duty to question suspicious prescriptions.

Mr. Lanier, who has made a career out of wresting eye-popping awards from Big Pharma, told the jury that the corporate entities should have been on notice as far back as 2012, when the Drug Enforcement Administration began pursuing Florida chain pharmacies for pumping out opioids that landed as far away as Ohio.

The jury first had to decide whether the oversupply of prescription pills and subsequent illegal diversion had created a public nuisance in each county.

Under the public nuisance law, a crisis must be continuing. But in recent years, the number of opioid prescriptions has dropped off, largely because of greater oversight from state and federal monitoring programs, revised guidelines for doctors and corporate compliance.

The counties' lawyers successfully argued that when the supply receded, patients who were addicted to the pills had turned to heroin and illegal fentanyl. That result was a foreseeable, direct descendant of the floods of prescription opioid pills, the lawyers said.

After jurors concluded that a public nuisance did exist related to the opioid crisis in the counties, they moved on to a second question. Did each pharmacy chain engage in conduct that was "intentional" or "illegal," substantially contributing to the public nuisance of the opioid crisis?

If so, under the law, defendants must pay to "abate" the "nuisance" that they exacerbated.

Like jury decisions in criminal cases, the verdict in this civil case had to be unanimous. But the jury needed to apply only "the greater weight of evidence" (at least 51 percent) as a standard of proof, which is lower than the level of "beyond a reasonable doubt" required to render a guilty verdict in criminal trials.

The pharmacy lawyers responded with arguments that appeals courts might yet find persuasive. Their stores amounted to a small fraction of the overall number of pharmacies, hospitals and clinics that dispense opioids in the two counties, they said, and the quantity of pills they sold was commensurately low.

There were far too many reasons that opioid medications exploded across the counties for blame to be laid so resoundingly at the feet of the pharmacies, their lawyers contended. They pointed to family medicine cabinets, the repository of so many unused pills, as troves for illegal diversion; to manufacturers, who solicited doctors and oversold the benefits of opioids and downplayed the risks; and to doctors who, urged to treat pain more aggressively, increasingly ordered larger and more potent quantities.

"We all know that it's the prescribers who control demand," said Brian Swanson, a lawyer for Walgreens. "Pharmacists don't create demand."

Repeatedly, the defendants' lawyers pointed the finger at the federal authorities. Not only were the drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration, they said, but the D.E.A. also set the annual limit on how many opioids could be produced in the country.

In his closing argument, John Majoras, a lawyer for Walmart, referred to the bridges over the Cuyahoga River, which can be seen from the courthouse. He said the plaintiffs had not built a bridge connecting all the required elements to prove that the pharmacies had caused a public nuisance.

Then Mr. Lanier stood up for his final remarks. He had been waiting, he said, to talk about just such a bridge. He then produced a model bridge made of hundreds of Legos.

There were many contributors to the crisis, he acknowledged. But pharmacies could not escape responsibility, Mr. Lanier argued, by claiming that they had put only relatively small quantities of opioids into the counties (and he disputed the defense's method of calculation).

The community relies on the sturdiness of the bridge's steel trestles, he said.

But what if, he asked, two or three are rotten or in the wrong place as people are driving over it? He then knocked out just a few. "Everything can fall," he said, as the model shattered in front of the jury.

Whether this verdict will survive on appeal remains to be seen. In addition to the many legal questions arising from the case, defendants are expected to continue their criticism of Judge Dan Aaron Polster, who presided over the trial and has, for years, supervised the aggregation of thousands of opioid lawsuits.

	<p>The statement from Walgreens seemed to forecast as much. “We believe the trial court committed significant legal errors in allowing the case to go before a jury on a flawed legal theory that is inconsistent with Ohio law,” it said.</p> <p>A dispute over whether a mistrial should have been declared could be among the arguments for appeal. A juror showed other jurors her outside research; the juror was dismissed, and the trial continued. And the pharmacy retailers are likely to resurrect their longstanding complaint — their belief that Judge Polster appeared to favor plaintiffs. Since 2018, he has urged all sides to settle so that the litigation would not be protracted and so that desperately needed relief could start flowing to communities ravaged by the opioid crisis.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 Organizers liable Charlottesville violence
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/23/us/charlottesville-rally-verdict.html
GIST	<p>CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — Jurors on Tuesday found the main organizers of the deadly far-right rally in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017 liable under state law for injuries to counterprotesters, awarding more than \$25 million in damages. But the jury deadlocked on two federal conspiracy charges.</p> <p>Still, the verdict was a clear rebuke of the defendants — a mix of white nationalists, neo-Nazis and Confederate sympathizers. They were found under Virginia law to have engaged in a conspiracy that led to injuries during the rally. The “Unite the Right” march began as a demonstration over the removal of a Confederate statue and led to the death of the counterprotester Heather Heyer, 32, when she was struck by a car driven by one of the defendants.</p> <p>The civil suit, heard in U.S. District Court in Charlottesville, was filed by four men and five women, including four of the people who were injured when Ms. Heyer was killed. The plaintiffs, whose injuries included concussions and a shattered leg, testified that they suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, the inability to concentrate, flashbacks and panic attacks.</p> <p>All sought compensatory and unspecified punitive damages, including payment for medical costs as well as \$3 million to \$10 million for pain and suffering depending on the degree of their injuries.</p> <p>The most prominent defendants included Richard Spencer, once seen as the leader of the alt-right in the United States; Jason Kessler, who organized the event; and Christopher Cantwell, a vocal neo-Nazi podcaster who is already serving 41 months in federal prison in a separate threats and extortion case.</p> <p>The counterprotesters’ lawyers said that they were considering pursuing a retrial on the federal conspiracy claim. However, the verdict that was returned achieved the same ends in holding the rally’s organizers responsible for violence motivated by racial, religious or ethnic animosity, they said.</p> <p>“Each and every one of them was found to be part of a conspiracy, and these award damage numbers send a message,” said Karen L. Dunn, one of the lead lawyers for the plaintiffs.</p> <p>The largest sums were awarded for punitive damages, with 12 individuals ordered to pay \$500,000 apiece while five white nationalist organizations were assessed \$1 million each. Any punitive damages paid will be divided evenly among the plaintiffs.</p> <p>James Fields, already serving multiple life sentences for murdering the counterprotester with his car, was found liable for \$12 million in punitive damages, as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars for medical expenses stemming from assault, battery and emotional distress.</p> <p>Lawyers for the far-right organizers said they would seek to reduce those amounts, and there was little chance that their clients could pay in any event. “The defendants in this case are destitute, none of them have any money,” said Joshua Smith, who represented Matthew Heimbach, Matthew Parrott and the Traditionalist Worker Party, modeled on the Germany’s Nazi Party.</p>

Mr. Smith sought to portray the decision as a victory for his clients, saying that the lawyers for the other side had expected to “waltz through” the case. A small group of protesters shouted “Get out of town!” at him as he stepped up to address reporters outside the federal courthouse.

Legal experts, however, said that the jury’s decision came down heavily on the side of the plaintiffs. “Though there is some ambiguity in the verdict, the bottom line is that the jury found for the plaintiffs and awarded significant compensatory and punitive damages,” said Richard C. Schragger, a professor at the University of Virginia Law School who had been following the case closely. Mr. Schragger said the outstanding question was why the jury found a racial conspiracy to commit violence under state law but deadlocked over a similar provision of federal law.

He and others noted the explanation of the federal statute in the instructions received by the jury was slightly more complex, including references to constitutional amendments and civil rights.

The lawyers for the counterprotesters said that in addition to holding march organizers responsible for the violence, they hoped to deter hate groups from mounting similar toxic spectacles in the future, relying on civil suits in the absence of decisive action by the criminal justice system.

The rally in 2017, which featured extremists carrying torches and chanting racist slogans, was organized as a protest against the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee that has since been dismantled. But its broader aim was to move the far right from the internet fringes into the national mainstream.

The federal charges related to whether the rally organizers had engaged in a race-based violent conspiracy, which is illegal under an 1871 federal law known as the Ku Klux Klan Act that was designed to prevent vigilantes from denying newly freed slaves their civil rights.

Many of them readily admitted to their racial animosity, but said they were exercising their First Amendment rights with a legal permit for the rally, not participating in a conspiracy to commit violence. They blamed the violence entirely on Mr. Fields, the demonstrator who mowed down counterprotesters with his car.

The jury was asked to decide whether each of the defendants had engaged in a conspiracy, and, if so, what compensation should be paid to the nine people suing them.

The jury began deliberating on Friday. The 77 pages of instructions from the judge explained how engaging in a conspiracy did not require all participants to forge an agreement or meet in the same room, or even to know one another. Nor did a conspiracy require the participants to have caused the violence themselves. The main point was that they all shared an objective and could foresee the violence that occurred.

The plaintiffs drew a line from Mr. Fields through all the organizations that participated, linking him first to Vanguard America, the group that he marched with in Charlottesville, and then to the other organizations and their leaders. Lawyers for the far-right protesters argued that it was just online chatter that did not amount to strong ties between them, much less a conspiracy. None of the other defendants knew Mr. Fields beforehand, they said, and he was not involved in organizing the event.

The four-week trial, long delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic, underscored how much the rally organizers and their groups were already sidelined, squabbling among themselves and financially strapped in the wake of the violent debacle in Charlottesville. Mr. Spencer, who defended himself during the trial, described the case in 2020 as “financially crippling.” Seven defendants ignored the proceedings. Their cases will be addressed separately by the court.

If many far-right players have been shunted aside, the ideology has not been. In recent decades, whenever far-right groups have lost in court, the movement has rebounded.

“While some of the messengers have been eviscerated, the more mainstream versions of their hatemongering continue to have real currency, with broad exposure guaranteeing that the violence of the far-right fringes will unfortunately continue,” said Brian Levin, the director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino.

In seeking to prove that the violence was foreseeable, the plaintiffs highlighted how often the idea of hitting protesters with cars came up beforehand.

Samantha Froelich, who was dating two of the main organizers simultaneously in the lead-up to the rally, but who has since left the movement, testified that hitting protesters with cars was discussed at a party earlier that summer in the “Fash Loft,” short for fascist, the nickname for Mr. Spencer’s apartment in Alexandria, Va.

After the violence, Mr. Parrott, whose Traditionalist Worker Party has since disbanded, and the others celebrated. “Charlottesville was a tremendous victory,” he said in a post. “The alt-right is not a pathetic and faceless internet fad, but a fearsome street-fighting force.”

While the plaintiffs’ case took three weeks and 36 witnesses, the defendants rested after a day and a half, having made four broad arguments. First, they argued that while others might deplore their views, the First Amendment allowed them. Second, that they acted in self-defense. Third, that the police were to blame for not keeping the opposing sides apart. Fourth, that none of them could anticipate what Mr. Fields did because none knew him.

The trial brought to life the hatred and anger espoused by the far-right groups, especially on the streets of Charlottesville. A torch-lit march on the eve of the rally, with hundreds of men chanting racist slogans, evoked Ku Klux Klan and Nazi marches. The testimony as well as the many videos and social media posts introduced were awash in the iconography of hate, with Nazi symbols and stiff-armed salutes, with admiration for Hitler and claims that nonwhite races were inferior.

Supporters of the far-right maintained a cheering section online full of expletive-laced rants against Black and Jewish people, while the defendants themselves weighed in with commentary. In an online interview, Michael Hill, 69, president of the League of the South, which seeks to establish a white ethno-state, called the courtroom a “front line” in the battle.

While testifying, Mr. Hill was asked to read part of a pledge that he had posted online. “I pledge to be a white supremacist, racist, antisemite, homophobe, a xenophobe, an Islamophobe and any other sort of phobe that benefits my people, so help me God,” he read with apparent enthusiasm. He added: “I still hold those views.”

Lawyers for the white supremacists had argued that such messages of hate were not enough to prove the plaintiffs’ case.

“They’ve proven to you that the alt-right is the alt-right — they are racists; they are antisemites,” James Kolenich, one of the defense lawyers, said in closing arguments. “But what does that do to prove a conspiracy?”

The lawyers for the plaintiffs said that the verdict was a condemnation of what happened in 2017 in Charlottesville.

“I think this verdict is a message today that this country does not tolerate violence based on racial and religious hatred in any form, and that no one will ever bring violence to the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, ever again,” said Roberta Kaplan, the lead attorney who organized the case through a nonprofit organization called Integrity First for America.

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SOURCE	https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2021/11/23/insurance-fraud-threat/
GIST	<p>Nearly 60% of those tasked with thwarting the multi-billion dollar threat posed by global crime rings are not yet up to the task, reports a study by the Coalition Against Insurance Fraud, IBM and Luxoft.</p> <p>The study surveyed financial crimes experts, data security analysts, government regulators, insurance professionals and others to better understand how anti-fraud experts from around the world are dealing with international fraud rings.</p> <p>The research found that fraud fighters – professionals tasked with investigating and prosecuting insurance fraud – in North America were the least prepared for threats from abroad.</p> <p>“Organized rings, both foreign and domestic, are stealing billions,” Coalition Co-Chair David Rioux of Erie Insurance said.</p> <p>“We’ve seen organized scammers exploit the telehealth system; intercept personal information through phishing scams and other data harvesting schemes; carry out ransomware attacks; and run a number of insurance scams using stolen or synthetic IDs off the dark web. These are all attacks that can be launched from anywhere in the world with a decent internet connection.”</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fraud fighters must prepare in the present to fight globalized fraud in the future. Globalized insurance fraud is not a priority at all for 27.7% of respondents and a low-to-medium priority for 57.5% of respondents, leading to a lack of resources and time invested in day-to-day operations fighting global insurance fraud. Respondents from North America assign a lower priority for global fraud reflecting a smaller number of companies that underwrite global insurance lines. • Recent attacks make the threat of global insurance fraud hard to ignore. Technological advances, recent attacks by individuals and groups in the news— as well as the onslaught of cyber crimes could increase the overall level of concern. 48.5% of respondents say they are either “very concerned” or “extremely concerned” about the future threat of global insurance fraud. • Deeper investments in anti-fraud technology and staffing are needed to keep pace with the threat of global insurance scammers. 56.8% of fraud fighters said they do not have dedicated resources or a fraud department specialized in dealing with globalized fraud – especially in North America. The EU/UK were more likely to have dedicated internal resources to fight global fraud. More than half of respondents said technology was either a component (41.3%) or the primary method (11.06%) by which their organization identifies, tracks, and responds to global fraud. The study found that organizations that have both a program and dedicated resources use technology more often. <p>The study surveyed fraud fighters living in 33 countries across North America, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and Africa.</p> <p>Estimated cost of insurance fraud around the world</p> <p>While there is no single estimate of the annual cost of insurance fraud around the world, an Insurance Europe report estimated there were €13 billion of fraudulent claims in the EU in 2017. Fraud accounted for about 10% of the property/casualty (PC) insurance industry’s incurred losses and loss adjustment expenses each year— or \$38 billion in 2020.</p> <p>U.S. insurers and consumers suffer \$80 billion in fraud across all lines of insurance each year. The FBI believes this costs the average American family between \$400 and \$700 in increased premiums per year. The survey also identified preparedness gaps in planning for coordinated fraud attacks from abroad.</p> <p>“There’s a lack of confidence in the tools, resources and knowledge organizations have in place to combat globalized insurance fraud,” reads one of the study’s key findings. Less than half of the worldwide respondents felt even “Somewhat confident” their organizations are equipped to address global fraud as opposed to the 4% who are “Extremely confident” their team is prepared for the challenge ahead.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/23 D.C. 200 th homicide; killings rise in cities
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-vb/2021/11/23/dc-200-homicides-gun-violence/
GIST	<p>The District on Monday recorded its 200th homicide this year, the first time that symbolic threshold of deadly violence has been reached in the nation's capital since 2003.</p> <p>A man was fatally shot at a gas station in Southeast Washington just after 10:15 p.m., becoming the latest victim of months of rising violence that has frustrated and angered city leaders and residents. Police have not yet publicly identified him.</p> <p>Homicides rose in 29 major U.S. cities through September compared with the same period last year, according to the Council on Criminal Justice, a Washington-based institute.</p> <p>Killings across the country spiked nearly 30 percent in 2020, the FBI has said. Baltimore surpassed 300 killings for the seventh consecutive year, and homicides in Philadelphia reached 497 on Monday, 13 percent higher than this time last year.</p> <p>Officials in the District and across the country say there is no simple explanation for the increase in deadly violence. District leaders have offered many possible reasons, including the proliferation of illegal firearms, their use in seemingly minor disputes and pandemic-induced disruptions that slowed courts, emptied jails, curtailed public transportation and ruptured the safety net relied on by many in the most underserved communities.</p> <p>The high number of slayings in the District is adding to the ongoing debate over how to reimagine policing amid calls from activists and lawmakers to de-emphasize the role of law enforcement and treat crime as a public health emergency by resolving root causes of poverty, inequality, addiction and joblessness.</p> <p>D.C. Police Chief Robert J. Contee III called reaching 200 homicides "very troubling," noting "lives that matter in our city were unnecessarily taken away too soon."</p> <p>In a recent interview, the police chief said some people simply "don't have empathy for another human being." He cited several killings over seemingly trivial matters, including one of a woman gunned down in front of her family during an argument with a neighbor.</p> <p>"What's the issue?" Contee said. "What is it over at the end of the day? Where is our sense of humanity?"</p> <p>Contee has pushed for more accountability in the criminal justice system in dealing with people his officers arrest, especially those charged in gun crimes.</p> <p>The D.C. police union attributes the crime spike to changes in policing born out of the 2020 summer of social unrest following the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer — which resulted in smaller departments and budgets — and new rules activists say are aimed at curbing police abuse but that critics say impede fighting crime. Activists reject linking crime increases to police reforms.</p> <p>There are nearly 200 fewer D.C. officers this year than last year, according to the department, the lowest in two decades.</p> <p>The union says more than half of the 417 members who left since the council-imposed measures in June 2020 resigned before being eligible for retirement.</p> <p>"This means over 225 police officers turned in their badge and walked away," union chairman Gregory Pemberton said in a statement. According to Pemberton, many saying they are frustrated over what they cite as restrictions in making arrests and other enforcement actions. "The Council's continued desire to reduce the size and funding of the police department hangs like a dark cloud of our city," he said.</p>

Killings in the District have risen each year since 2017, when 116 were recorded. Last year, the city counted 198 killings. Shootings, which spiked 48 percent last year, are down slightly in 2021. Crime involving juveniles is also up, police say, with 24 people age 17 and younger charged with murder in the past 22 months.

This year's victims include 6-year-old Nyiah Courtney, who was struck by a stray bullet in July as she walked with her parents in Southeast Washington. A month earlier, a Peace Corps worker walking from a dinner date with his wife in the Logan Circle area was killed by a stray bullet. Three people were killed in a shooting in September on Longfellow Street, part of attacks along the volatile Kennedy Street corridor in Northwest Washington. A 66-year-old Uber Eats driver was killed in March when his vehicle was carjacked by two girls, ages 13 and 15.

Homicides in neighboring Prince George's County are rising, too, going over 100 for the first time since 2008. Killings are also up in Montgomery County and in Fairfax County.

On Nov. 12, Chanae McLaughlin, 35, became the District's 194th homicide victim this year. She was stabbed to death during a dispute on Florida Avenue and North Capitol Street NW.

Her mother, Charron McKethean-Shaw, said McLaughlin had been living with friends and had just gotten keys to a new apartment in the Marshall Heights neighborhood of Southeast.

She hoped her new home would allow her to reunite with her three children, ages 3, 4 and 9. The eldest, a boy, lives with McKethean-Shaw. Her 3-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter live with their father.

McLaughlin was among more than two dozen women slain in the District this year.

"We have to clean up this city," said McKethean-Shaw, who teaches public school in Virginia. "It really hurts to see this. ... I want justice. I want somebody to pay. My child was a good child. She didn't deserve this. She didn't just leave me, she left three kids behind."

Thomas Abt, a senior fellow at the Council on Criminal Justice, attributed the increase in slayings in cities across the country to what he called "community gun violence" that is "concentrated in small networks of people and places."

Speaking at a webcast forum this month, Abt promoted the idea of "focused deterrence" to identify core offenders, a tactic the District is using in a program called Building Blocks D.C. that identifies the 151 blocks in the city where much of the gunfire occurs.

"The concept is to focus on the highest-risk people in the highest-risk places," Abt said in an interview. He chairs the council's Violent Crime Working Group, which also includes as a member Linda K. Harlee Harper, who runs the District's Building Blocks initiative.

Abt said the rise in gun violence in many cities is similar to previous trends and has always been concentrated in high-risk groups. "The violence has intensified, but it's not new violence," he said.

The pandemic has exacerbated challenges for people who had already been living on the margins and largely disenfranchised, Abt said. Some programs may have reached them, he said, but when coronavirus-closures hit, "all of those efforts suddenly stopped."

Abt said police and other leaders are getting better at targeting programs aimed at helping people before they become involved in violence. "We're not doing enough of those things," he said, "but they do have a positive impact."

The District is in the midst of trying several ideas, including extending the reach of violence interrupter programs into schools and hospitals, diverting calls away from police on some mental health emergencies, boosting job training for people returning home from prison and investing more in housing.

Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) on Thursday said programs are “being targeted” where they’re needed most, with some having short-term benefits, such as summer and fall crime initiatives that reduced violence by 70 percent in selected neighborhoods. Others have longer-term goals, such as “how do we get to people before they commit crime.”

She added: “We are going to try everything that shows promise until we flatten the curve that is violence.”

After a year-long police hiring freeze following a D.C. Council-imposed budget cut, the mayor and lawmakers reached an agreement earlier this year to restart hiring, though not as many officers as the administration had wanted. Officials say the new hires won’t start hitting the streets until 2022.

“We have a violent crime crisis, quite frankly a gun crisis, in the city,” Christopher Geldart, the deputy mayor for public safety and justice, told residents last month at a meeting on Capitol Hill, where three people were fatally shot in separate attacks in October, including one on a sports field after a dispute at a flag-football game.

“I can’t understand the rationale of cuts in police funding given this gun crisis,” one resident said.

A woman who said she heard a half-dozen gunshots while driving with her 5-year-old child through Capitol Hill at lunchtime told the group: “I am not scared. I’m mad. This community needs to be protected. It needs resources.”

However, another woman said more police and prison sentences “don’t prevent gun violence,” while one man said crime “is not something we can sweep under the rug with incarceration.”

Charles Allen (D-Ward 6), who chairs the public safety committee, said the District needs to identify people before they resort to violence, or become victims of it, “rather than waiting until after the fact.”

In an interview later, Allen said many of the killings are the results of what he calls “instant conflicts,” people acquainted with or running into each other who turn to firearms when they have conflicts.

“These are incredibly difficult conflicts to stop by policing or by programs,” Allen said.

He attributed the anger, in part, to the “accumulated trauma of two years of a pandemic” that he said “is fraying and fracturing the relationships people have and the humanity. How do we change that dynamic?”

D.C. Council member Kenyan R. McDuffie (D-Ward 5), who is giving up a seat he has held since 2012 to run for D.C. attorney general, said in an interview that “right now, people across the District of Columbia don’t feel safe.”

He said lawbreakers need to be held accountable, but he also said that in neighborhoods where gunfire is common, there is also “a desire and a need for opportunity — jobs, education and housing.”

McDuffie — who, if elected attorney general, would oversee the prosecution of some gun crimes — said he supports the city’s attempt at a whole-government approach, though it remains fragmented and more needs to be done.

“Police should not be relied on exclusively to keep people safe across the city,” he said.

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HEADLINE	11/23 L.A. luxury mall latest hit in smash-and-grab
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/la-luxury-mall-latest-hit-smash-grab-thieves-81363652
GIST	LOS ANGELES -- A group of thieves smashed windows at a department store at a luxury mall in Los Angeles, triggering a police pursuit just days after high-end stores throughout the San Francisco Bay Area were targeted.

The latest incident in a national trend of smash-and-grab crimes targeted a Nordstrom store at The Grove retail and entertainment complex. It came as the country's largest consumer electronics chain said an increase in organized theft was taking a toll on its bottom line.

Workers covered a large broken window at the Nordstrom with black plywood Tuesday morning as security guards and shoppers alike came in and out of the store. Michel Moore, chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, said the agency would beef up its visible patrols around high-end stores citywide beginning Tuesday night and into the Thanksgiving and Black Friday weekend.

Crimes like these "have a profoundly greater impact on the sense of safety and security than simply the dollar loss of the merchandise," Moore said.

The thieves struck around 10:40 p.m. Monday, using a sledgehammer and an e-bike to break the window's glass, Moore said. About 20 people were involved in the smash-and-grab theft, stealing about \$5,000 worth of merchandise and leaving roughly \$15,000 worth of damage to the store when they fled.

Officers pursued an SUV involved in the crime, and the chase ended with three people — including a juvenile — arrested. Officers found Nordstrom merchandise in the SUV, as well as items that appeared to be stolen during a CVS burglary earlier in the day.

The Grove incident followed a weekend of similar brazen thefts in the San Francisco Bay Area and Beverly Hills in which groups of people, some carrying crowbars and hammers, ransacked high-end stores and stole jewelry, sunglasses, suitcases, clothing and other merchandise before fleeing in waiting cars.

Prosecutors from seven Bay Area counties said they will make a joint effort to combat organized retail theft and met Tuesday with a representative of the state attorney general's office to discuss a partnership to "develop effective solutions to breaking up the fencing networks that are driving this kind of crime," said a statement from the office of San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin.

Boudin also announced that felony charges had been filed against nine people for a series of Friday night thefts involving a Louis Vuitton store, a cannabis dispensary and a Walgreens.

The thefts are believed to be part of sophisticated criminal networks that recruit mainly young people to steal merchandise in stores throughout the country and then sell it in online marketplaces. Experts and law enforcement officials say the thefts are ratcheting up as the holiday shopping season gets underway.

The National Retail Federation said a recent survey found stores are seeing an increase in organized thefts and perpetrators being more aggressive.

The electronics chain Best Buy on Tuesday cited organized theft as one of the reasons for a decline in gross profit margin in the third quarter.

"This is a real issue that hurts and scares real people," Best Buy CEO Corie Barry told analysts during a conference call Tuesday.

Barry told reporters during a separate call that the company is seeing organized theft increase across the country, but particularly in San Francisco. She said the company is hiring security guards and working with its vendors on creative ways to stage products.

Yet loss prevention agents and security guards are generally trained not to engage with thieves, said mall and retail security expert David Levenberg. They are not trained or equipped to pursue or subdue suspects, and the likelihood of violence is too great; instead they are supposed to "observe and report."

"The value of the merchandise is not worth somebody being injured or killed," he said.

Workplace security expert Hector Alvarez said retailers need to think about how to manage their customers while a smash-and-grab theft is underway. Stores have an obligation to keep their shoppers safe during these events, he said, like they would if a fire occurred.

Customers should not intervene or confront the thieves, he said, but focus on being a good witness for law enforcement.

While these brazen crimes are still relatively rare, “it’s now become hazardous in some instances to go shopping,” said Alvarez, president of California-based Alvarez Associates LLC.

No shoppers were reported injured in the latest incidents.

The flash mobs are usually organized by local people who recruit their crews and send them to steal specific merchandise requested by criminal organizations throughout the U.S., said Ben Dugan, president of the Coalition of Law Enforcement and Retail.

Those who do the stealing get paid between \$500 and \$1,000 to take as much as they can and bring it back to organizers who ship it to other parts of the country.

“Crew bosses organize them. They’ll give him the crowbars, and in some cases even rent them cars, or provide them with escape routes or a list of products to actually go out and steal. It looks very chaotic, but it’s actually very well organized,” Dugan said.

“We’re not talking about someone who needs money or needs food. These are people who go out and do this is for high profit, and for the thrill,” he said.

In some cases, though, the thieves may be copycats rather than people working with organized networks, Levenberg said. He said the thieves may be thinking: “Did you see what happened in San Francisco? Let’s go to the Grove and do it.”

And while smash-and-grab thefts are occurring nationwide, Levenberg said cities with progressive prosecutors — like Los Angeles and San Francisco — are especially hard-hit because the punishments for perpetrators are not as harsh as in other cities.

“The consequences are minimal, and the profits are substantial,” said Levenberg, founder of Florida-based Center Security Services.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said Monday that his office met with retailers over the weekend who asked for more police patrols.

He said increased enforcement would start immediately “in and around areas that are highly trafficked and coming into the holiday season Black Friday in shopping malls.”

Retailers lose about \$65 billion each year to organized theft, the bulk stolen by professional thieves, Dugan said.

Last week, 14 suspects went into a Louis Vuitton store in Oak Brook, a Chicago suburb, pulled large plastic bags from their coats and filled them with clothing and other items, stealing more than \$120,000 in merchandise, police said.

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HEADLINE	11/23 Lawyer: suspect Brian Laundrie killed self
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/brian-laundrie-boyfriend-murdered-travel-blogger-gabby-petito/story?id=81351743

GIST	<p>The death of Brian Laundrie, the boyfriend of murdered travel blogger Gabby Petito, has been ruled a suicide, according to the Laundrie family attorney.</p> <p>Laundrie's remains were found Oct. 21 at the Carlton Reserve in North Port, Florida, in an area that had been submerged in water during a month-long search. The Sarasota County medical examiner did not conclude a manner or cause of death, so Laundrie's remains were brought to a forensic anthropologist for analysis.</p> <p>Laundrie's parents, Chris Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie, were informed by the anthropologist that Laundrie's apparently died from a gunshot wound to the head, family attorney Steven Bertolino said in a statement to ABC News Tuesday.</p> <p>Petito's family has been aware of the circumstances surrounding Laundrie's death but won't be commenting on new details at the request of the United States Attorney's Office and the Teton County Prosecutor's Office.</p> <p>"The family was asked to not make any comments and let the FBI continue their investigation," Petito's family members said in a statement. "The family was also asked to wait for the United States Attorney's Office to make a determination on whether any additional individuals will be charged. When that determination is made, we will have a statement."</p> <p>Laundrie disappeared on Sept. 14, three days after Petito was reported missing by her family. He was named a person of interest in her disappearance the next day.</p> <p>Petito's remains were found Sept. 19 in Bridger-Teton National Forest in Wyoming, nearly a month after she was last seen in public. She and Laundrie had set off on a cross-country trip to visit national parks in June and documented the trip on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube.</p> <p>Federal and state investigators believe Petito disappeared between Aug. 27 and Aug. 30. Laundrie returned to Florida, to the home the couple shared with his parents, on Sept. 1 with Petito's van, which she had converted for the journey.</p> <p>In addition to the nationwide search for the couple, Petito's disappearance sparked a national conversation on domestic violence and the preferential treatment of missing white women.</p> <p>Petito's family founded the Gabby Petito Foundation to "address the needs of organizations that support locating missing persons and to provide aid to organizations that assist victims of domestic violence situations."</p>
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